

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

**Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing**

Volume 14, Number 3

November, 1989

...from the editor....

None of us particularly needs any reminders of all the areas of expertise required to work in writing labs. But the articles in this month's newsletter expand that list by noting that we ought to know how to work with students with physical or learning disabilities, how to interact with the high tech world of computer facilities, and even, as one tutor shows us, how to apply principles of auto engine repair to explanations of grammar. That may leave you feeling a bit overprogrammed or maybe slightly schizophrenic, but the author of another article also reminds us how useful it can be to catch a glimpse of ourselves from our students' perspectives.

Each month the authors of newsletter articles help us expand our horizons just a bit more, and as an indication to these authors of the appreciation many of you express, I try to reserve space each month for a reader comment or two about some particularly useful article. Keep sending in your articles and comments, and I'll keep relaying the messages.

-Muriel Harris, editor

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**The Union of a Writing
Center with a
Computer Center:
What to Put in the
Marriage Contract**

In any marriage, certain issues have to be faced, like money, sex, children, and in-laws. What are these issues when you merge your writing center with a large computer center? We discovered some of them in the fall of 1987 when the English Department at Weber State College joined its Writing Center with one of the new computer centers being set up in an on-campus network. Since ever-dwindling funds are making such mergers necessary on campuses across the country, directors of other writing centers might benefit from hearing about our experience.

Included in our merger, like the child of a previous marriage, was the English Department Computer Lab, which had supported all our freshman writing classes since 1981. This computer lab presented the first and most diffi-

cult issue. We, the carefree bachelor, had been in complete control of our life, enjoying unquestioned autonomy over our Writing Center and lab. But since the new Center would be financed by an assessment on all students at enrollment and by monies from the general fund, a new structure was necessary. We turned supervision of our computers over to the professional staff in Academic Computing, giving up the complete control we formerly enjoyed, but gaining involved and informed professionals who would handle all the day-to-day management, give us information, help us solve problems, and educate us about possibilities we would not otherwise have even known existed.

The second issue arose when our bride moved in and shuffled our comfortable old arm chair out of our favorite spot to make room for her slick new Art Deco sofa. Did we really have to live together? Couldn't we still have a computer center devoted entirely to writing? In our case, since the new center had been made possible by financial and other support from our Social Sciences School, the facility would obviously support both social sciences and writing. But what balance should be struck between the two? To give Social Sciences a role in management decisions, we established a supervisory committee composed of faculty from their school, and from the English Department, plus the head of Academic Computing. And again the problems have been far outweighed by the advantages: a new communication and understanding between the disciplines.

Training our new staff brought up a third issue: in this marriage, who would do the cooking? This, too, must be faced on most campuses. How much should a computer staff be trained? Should they be merely caretakers for the machines, or should they be actively involved in student learning? Should the faculty be totally responsible for teaching their students how to use a computer for writing? Or should students be responsible for their own learning in this area? Or- a third alternative-should there be a staff to help students learn basic word processing skills? At Weber State, the English Department had to justify its tradition of constantly available help, appropriate in situations where new users feel both writing and computer anxiety, but unique on a campus where students are expected to learn new software packages entirely on their own. We've created a brief tutorial for our new WordPerfect

and posted visual aids on the walls to answer frequent questions. And we've conducted a detailed survey of our students' most frequent questions to become more efficient with our help. But we're still asked to justify our intensive staff.

The fourth major issue is how much independence we should maintain in this marriage. Can we still go bowling with the boys? Do we still want to? How closely should writing centers, and the writing tutors' skills found there, be integrated with the computers in a center like ours, where responsibility is shared and the two parts of the center independently funded?

In spite of organizational problems, we are working at Weber State to increase student use of computers in more efficient and creative ways. First, we're teaching our writing assistants revising skills on the computer, and encouraging them to pass these newly learned skills on to the students they tutor, and second, we're hiring students to be both writing and computer assistants, employed, though at different times, on both sides of the Center. We are developing advanced class orientations which emphasize invention techniques and revision skills on the computer, using such features as double screens and block moves.

(cont. on Dace 6)

The Writing Lab Newsletter, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779

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Donations: The newsletter is an informal publication with no billing procedures. Yearly donations of \$7.50 (U.S. \$12.50 in Canada) are requested to cover costs of duplicating and mailing. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

The Writing Center Through Writers' Eyes

Many of the writing tutors at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks Writing Center are graduate teaching assistants in English who teach one class of freshman composition and tutor six hours per week, per semester, in the Writing Center. This talented tutor/teacher workforce has often allowed me to see the writing center from new viewpoints. Several semesters ago, one tutor/teacher, Ken, told me he had asked his student writers to come to the center for a required first visit, sharing their first class paper. Their second paper, he said, was a narrative essay describing that visit to the Writing Center. Would I like to read them?

When I did, for of course I could hardly wait to read the narratives, I was impressed. What sounded at first like a gimmicky, possibly dangerous, teacher-centered assignment seemed full of possibility as a class activity (the narratives were lively, vivid and insightful) and full of information for me as center coordinator. Although the students generally gave a favor-able view of the center, many wrote of revelatory moments, memorable acts of tutoring tact, debilitating instances of personal writing fear or anger, and, often, the surprise and pleasure involved in sharing their drafts with readers. I asked Ken to ask his students for permission to copy and use the essays. When I received permission, I began exploring the world of the writing center through writers' eyes by posting several of these narratives on a board outside the center that I labeled: "A Trip to the Writing Center." This board was targeted at the shy writing center visitor who lingered in the hall or at the inevitable friend who came along with a tutee but who never dreamed of being tutored himself, and at the students in Ken's class. When they returned for more tutoring as we hoped they would after an initial "required" first visit, Ken's writers would have the pleasure of seeing themselves "published."

In succeeding weeks, I noticed the tutors too were reading the narratives. Soon, another tutor/teacher, Trecie, offered me a set of writing process journal responses, shorter than the essays I had already collected due to being written during class time, but equally interesting. Again I asked for permission to use them, and my display of narratives was enlarged.

Realizing the tutors in the center found the student narratives as interesting as the shy or potential tutee, I looked at the narratives more closely. There seemed to be a lot that we could all learn from a narrative like this one:

The uncomfortableness I felt while at the Writing Center impeded the progress on my essay. Accepting criticism, and even praise, over my writing has always been extremely difficult for me. I consider each phrase or paragraph a personal triumph. That is why laying myself wide open for such re-marks was so terrifying.

Although I was unsatisfied with the work I had completed thus far, I could not bring myself to express these inadequacies to my tutor. The comments she offered though proved valuable and were a considerable help when I had to rewrite the piece. I only wish now that I had been able to relax and enjoy the full benefit of her advice. I will probably return when the next essay is assigned.

Where, I asked myself, would I ever find a better description of writing anxiety than in this distressing but ultimately satisfying first visit? Next time I taught a tutor training class or held a tutor meeting, I could use these narratives to illustrate theory. What follows is a selection of narratives and general discussion of what we learned from them.

Paired with the narrative quoted above, I chose to share an essay where the writer, seemingly, is in the reverse situation, suffering horn over rather than underconfidence. This writer was worried about sharing his "good" writing with what he perceived of as a remedial service. Still, in his narrative he discussed some of his hidden apprehension (for we as teachers, tutors, and writers know all writers probably experience some anxiety) when he talked of papers that were "ripped apart and looked at piece by piece." Also, I wanted my tutors to see themselves from this viewpoint: were we people who "tear apart" writing? Part of this writer's essay follows:

The first time I went to the Writing Center I was more than a little hesitant. I'd never had trouble writing and I was taken aback when someone suggested a tutorial service to help me with something I have always thought I've done quite well.

It was a couple of weeks after the suggestion that I actually went....Although I felt unusually satisfied with the topic and some of the ideas I had come up with, I was having some trouble organizing my thoughts into an understandable essay.

I'll admit, my attitude going into the Writing Center wasn't very good. I was still hesitant to ask for help with something that comes as naturally to me as writing does. I'm glad I went. I went in and proceeded to have my paper ripped apart and looked at piece by piece. At first I was mad that anyone would presume to tear apart what I thought was a pretty good start. But, as we continued to work on it, I began to like what I saw.

I had the opportunity to work with someone who took a fresh look at my ideas and helped me organize my thoughts into a clear topic. It was easier for her to see my ideas objectively and in terms of what they would do for my paper....

With tutors, I posed more questions: how different and how similar were the first and the second writers? In what ways did each manifest writing anxiety? What changes did each claim (or seem) to have made due to writing center visits?

A third writer's narrative graphically illustrated the anxiety students experience when asking for writing help. I quote him in part:

As I walked up the stairs to my destination, I took each step slowly, I wondered what this place called "The Writing Center" was like, what was its purpose? The time was 6:55 PM, the day October 5th. I had not made an appointment, and I was curious whether they were going to have room

to fit me in their schedule. In a way, I hoped they did not have space. I had prepared a paper that I felt confident about, however I sometimes have problems approaching new systems and ways of doing things....As I entered the heavily lightened room a desk sat to my right and a large room divider stood up directly in front of me. An older woman sat at the desk with a fellow student of mine, the conversation looked serious. Behind the blind I also heard voices. I then said to myself, "Well Scott looks like they are packed, shucks". Then suddenly a younger gentleman came out from behind the blind and said, "do you have an appointment", I replied, "nope". Well then you can take this chair and have a seat outside.

Has anyone ever written a better description of the writing center as a dreaded doctor's waiting room and writer as a possible terminal victim? Nonetheless, with my tutors I was able to praise the quick "younger gentlemen" who didn't let this tutee leave in spite of the tutee's near insistence that the visit wouldn't/couldn't work out. My tutors also enjoy seeing themselves being seen by writers: as older, gray haired, friendly, stem, and in one gloriously irreverent written description even as a woman of easy virtue. In this case, what could have been a feminist's nightmare turned out to be a witty new way of looking at our-selves, as in this writer's narrative:

...as I filled out the form another woman who was trying not to be late came breezing in. I could see she didn't have time to dry her hair from the morning's shower, it was wet and combed back. She threw her things in a chair, took her coat off, while talking to the woman who gave me the form. She was to be my instructor.

We went down the hall to another room where she told me her name was Marsha and we would only have a half an hour. I watched as she placed her watch on the table.

I was thinking how what she said reminded me of a scene from a film. You know the one, when the uninterested whore would tell her client the procedure, light a cigarette and say,

when the cigarette burns down time is up. This is how I was feeling. It seemed she was trying to rush the session, this made me feel a little uncomfortable.

She asked what I wanted to discuss, so I showed her my last paper....At this point during the session her watch beeps but we continue.

I show Marsha my new assignment and explain to her how I have trouble coming up with ideas. She suggest a brainstorming exercise which is something else I'm not good at. She doesn't tell me to start writing, she suggest we both make lists. Lists of people we know, things we own, family members, likes and dislikes. Once we both had lists we began to narrow my list down and try to find a topic.

By this time we both had be-come more at ease and relaxed. She seemed more interested in helping rather than trying to hurry and finish.

I felt we were really starting to accomplish a lot when her watch beeps a second time. An hour had gone by very quickly. I thought she might be bothered by this because of what was said about having a half-hour at the start of the session. We talked a little more, her hair had dried. I enjoyed listening to her speak. She gave me good ideas and helped me to under-stand more clearly. By the end of the session I could tell that she loved to help students with these sorts of problems....Her attitude was completely different by now. She probably woke up late and had to rush around that morning so she wouldn't be late for work....

As I was about to leave the room, I walked over to the table, put a crisp hundred dollar bill next to the ash tray and put out what was left of a smoldering cigarette.

The tutors and I sensed a lot of learning, understanding and, ultimately, appreciation in this cleverly written narrative. We learned from this and other narratives how perceptive and watchful these writers are. Here is another example:

When I thought about going to the Writing Center, I thought I would walk in and find an english major with her hair in a bun, resting her feet on a stack of Shakespearian literature, and eating a bowl of tofu and sprouts.

But to my surprise, I found Alma; a five foot four inch woman with brown hair with about thirty gray strands cut in a bob.

Alma was wearing a long sieve, cream colored sweater with the collar of an oxford shirt in the same color. Her sweater matched the thin stripes in the thin, blown wool pants.... I assumed she was married, because she was wearing a diamond wedding band set in silver. On her other ring finger, she had another silver ring that held a very large pearl; which matched her earrings....

Needless to say, Alma herself had never imagined she was being subjected to such scrutiny. Besides watching our appearance, we found that tutors' physical responses to a paper were far more important to a tutee than we had guessed. Here is a section from a narrative focused in this direction:

Lisa, a teacher's assistant, greeted me warmly as I walked through the door. She asked me if I had an appointment. I said no. She also asked if it was my first time using the writing center. That I answered yes to. We both introduced ourselves then sat down at the first table you see when you walk in. While I filled out the form she started to read my paper. I couldn't help but watch the expressions on her face as she read my words. At some points she smiled and looked amused. Then other times she seemed puzzled by something in the paper. When she finished reading the paper she told me she liked it but I needed to clarify a few sentences. We went over the paper together.

This narrative showed tutors how they appear to tutees and also showed me, as center coordinator, how efficiently our opening procedures were being followed (talking, filling out forms, reading and sharing the writing).

Other narratives continued to focus on the experience of having one's writing read and what that meant to the writer:

I was greatly impressed at what I found at the writing center. I worked with two people, and both were very friendly. Although they were pointing out mistakes in my paper, they were very gentle about it. One helpful technique that I rarely practice was recommended by the center. By simply reading the paper out loud, I was able to find many more awkward sentences than when I read it inside my head.

Several narratives touched on the issue of directive versus reflective or responsive tutoring styles. Writers noted that they had been given direction but pleasantly and comfortably as the the narrative above and indicated gratitude for such gentle handling (non-directive discussion or mirroring of concerns):

He asked what my favorite part of the essay was and I answered that I liked the paragraph with examples. He didn't come right out and say it but he implied that I should elaborate on examples and use that as the base of my essay. I followed his suggestion and found that rewriting my essay was much easier when I chose to write about what gave me the most pleasure.

Other writers weren't so happy with the reader-response, audience-based tenor of our center. Like a writer quoted earlier, they expected papers to be "ripped apart"? Here is a writer who responded to mirroring with confusion:

My personal feelings about the writing center are hard to define at this point as I expected a more thorough break down of my essay and further comments on how to improve my writing. Since my expectations were not met, I am left wondering wheather I wrote a nearly perfect essay or the philosophy of the writing center is to give mainly positive feedback to not discourage us new writers.

These narratives led to a lively tutor/ tutor trainer discussion about dlrectiveness in

tutoring sessions and tutee expectations. These narratives could be followed up by one like this in which the writer has understood the reasons for tutors not taking control of a writer's work:

We spent the next forty-five or so minutes rearranging, clarifying, and deleting different part of my paper. It actually went from being a complete failure to being somewhat readable, which was quite an improvement. It was almost like being in English class-without all the "extras". We didn't bother slaving over all the rules, but got right down to improving my paper. In that space of time, I was shown how to read my paper objectively, which allowed me to cut out a few unneeded passages, how to state ideas clearly, and so forth. Best of all, I was in complete control I could either accept or reject any of the tutor's suggestions, although you can be sure that I heeded most of them....

Finally, tutees made interesting distinctions about the value of tutors as readers. For one writer, the Writing Center provided a real, responsive audience for her writing:

My visit to the Writing Center helped build my confidence in my writing. June offered me some helpful suggestions and seemed genuine in her compliments about my story. She had stated that the story made her hungry for berries- this was a reaction I was pleased to receive.

Other narratives mentioned moments when tutors " got the point" of a story and laughed in the right place. Balanced with this real reader was the unreal reader tutors were viewed as experts but were not the same as a teacher audience. "I turned the paper in and it was returned to me a week later. I was a little disappointed. There were some comments made that I thought 'the expert' should have caught." Clearly, tutors, teacher, and writing center directors need to help writers under-stand the value of real, tutor audiences, and sort out the problematic distinctions between tutor/coach and teacher/evaluator that can exist in the tutoring effort. Luckily, this same disappointed writer was able to sort out the

problem for himself. In the next sentence of his narrative he wrote:

Recently, I have thought back to my first visit. I had not understood the concept behind the Writing Center. I had walked in, dumped off my paper, and basically said, "it might be broke; fix it." I know this is not the way to learn something.

And then he described his next, more productive center visit.

One final narrative shows the strength tutor/teachers in our center and peer tutors have, in general, to help student writers understand the complex academic world they move in. This writer explained:

On the first paper we made a whole lot of corrections. Once we got done I could really see what a difference it had made in the overall paper. This also gave me an idea of what college teachers were looking for. She [tutor] was different from Ken [writer's teacher].... She seemed to me at least, to enjoy the second paper better than the first. On this paper she made a lot less suggestions for improvement. Oddly enough, that is the paper Ken [teacher] liked the least of the two. I think that it [Writing Center] is a great resource to have and I will be going back there in the future I am sure.

This writer was learning that writing evaluation and writing enjoyment were complicated processes and that different "reasonable" readers could offer different evaluations and reasons for such evaluations.

Every time I read these narrative, I want to share them more extensively with my tutors (if only we had more time), I want to explicate them further, and I want to collect more. My sorrow in this short essay comes from space limitations, that I can't show you another and another and another narrative. My pleasure in this essay comes from encouraging you to collect writers' narratives from your own writing center community. If you have access to a class of writers, ask them to take ten minutes to describe their last writing center visit. If you see value in a narrative essay describing a trip

to the writing center, try introducing such an essay into your curriculum. If you lack these options, try to ask regular center visitors to fill out a brief response paragraph, describing one of their recent visits. Using any of these formats, you stand to learn a lot about your center, yourself as tutor, and the worlds] of your writers when you look at the writing center through their eyes.

Wendy Bishop University of
Alaska, Fairbanks

One of the rewards of being an editor of an NCTE affiliate publication has been to receive the friendly notes and communications sent out by Bob Hamm, the Director of Affiliate Publications at NCTE. In one of the F.Y.I. sheets he sent out before his recent retirement, he passed along something he read in "Up-date," the newsletter of the British Columbia English Teachers' Association. The co-editor, Mike Stack, had included the following:

To EYRE is Human

While trying to get Grade 12 students to respond to Bronte's important, but, to the average Grade 12 student, tedious novel, I found that assigning "bonus marks" for outrageous puns on the heroine's name serves to sweeten the bitter pill of the 600-page (no pictures!) work. For example, if Jane were an antique dealer rather than a teacher, what would the novel be called? (Jane Heirloom).

Try these: 1. If Jane were a political pollster. 2. If Jane were sexually unresponsive. 3. If Jane went cruisin' with Jack Kerouac. 4. If Jane were a learned scholar. 5. If Jane cooked on a smoke-less grill. 6. If there were a new version starring Henry Fonda's daughter.

(The answers to Mike Stack's Jane Eyre questions : 1. Jane Questionnaire; 2. Jane Frigidatre; 3. Jane Bet Air, 4. Jane Erudite; 5. Jen Air, 6. Jane Aerobic.)

National Writing Centers Association

The Assembly

The National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, was founded in 1983 to foster communication among writing centers and to provide a forum for concerns. Comprised of directors and staffs of writing centers at universities, two-year colleges, and public schools, the NWCA is governed by an Executive Board which includes representatives from the regional writing center organizations.

Publications

The Assembly sponsors two publications: 1) the Writing Lab Newsletter, edited by Muriel Harris at Purdue, provides a monthly forum for writing center concerns during the academic year; and 2) the Writing Center Journal, edited by Jeanette Harris of Texas Tech and Joyce Kinkead of Utah State University, offers in its two issues per year longer articles on writing center theory and research.

Awards

NWCA offers the following awards: (1) an award to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to writing centers, and (2) awards to recognize outstanding publications on writing centers. In addition, small grants are available to graduate students whose research focuses on writing centers; regional associations may also apply for grants to hold conferences.

Meetings

The NWCA meets twice a year, once during NCTE and once during CCCC. At the November convention, NWCA sponsors a day-long workshop; at CCCC in March, the assembly sponsors a special interest session- along with an exchange of writing center materials. The Executive Board meetings at these conferences are open to the membership.

Membership

A payment of \$20 includes membership plus subscriptions to both publications; \$12.50 includes membership plus a subscription to either the Writing Center Journal or the Writing Lab Newsletter. Send your name, preferred

mailing address, and an indication of whether you are a new or renewing member to Joyce Kinkead, Department of English, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-3200 (Phone 801-750-2725). NWCA cannot send out invoices.

Union of a writing center (cont. from p.2)

Our combined writing/computer assistants will be able to put the new orientations into the context of computers-used-to-create-writing, rather than machines-for-keying-in-already-composed-text. We are rearranging our center physically, so that the machines do not march in rows for computer users. but cluster in small groups for writers who are collaborating. And we are forming a small group of faculty from across the disciplines to meet regularly and discuss techniques for using computers to improve writing. We hope also to have a larger campus group which wants to hear about the results of our study.

When writing centers unite with computer centers, these four issues must be faced-who will supervise the center, how much will the computers be shared with other disciplines, who will teach students to use the computers for writing, and how much should the writing center and the computer center be integrated. The answers will differ on each campus, depending on available funds, personnel, student background, and campus goals.

But if you enter into an arranged marriage, take comfort in the knowledge that such enforced collaboration brings its own benefits. In our case the rather uneasy marriage of convenience with which we began has grown into one of respect and good humor. The plain little bride that we initially tended to ignore has turned into a helpful companion, enriching us with her dowry.

Lee McKenzie Weber
State College Ogden, Utah

Tutors' Column

Tuterin' is like torquein'

He's standing in the door of the Writing Center. Gazing at nothing in particular, he shuffles around, not quite daring to cross some non-existent barrier. His expression says, "I don't want to be here. Tell me to go away."

Someone has sent him here. He didn't come because he wanted to. A friend, or probably his professor, told him, "Go to the Writing Center!"

Well, he's here. He stands awkward and reticent, like so many first timers, waiting for someone to solve his problem.

"Can I help you?"

Before he can answer, the bag comes off his shoulder and he slides into the plastic chair at the plastic table. "Yeah, what can you do to fix this up?" His red-scarred theme paper drifts on to the table. "You know, she really expects a lot from us, and I'm getting worried because I don't know what she wants. Look! What's the problem here?"

"What's your name?"

"Oh, Ed. But you know, I can't see anything wrong with this sentence. She said that maybe a tutor could help me. What's wrong with it?"

"Ed, have you talked about comma splices in your class?"

"Ahh...I think. Is this one?"

"Well, what do you think? Read it to me."

He read, "When I got the boot on over the axle, he said I'd done something I could be proud of especially since I was only ten years old, I'll never forget that and my confidence in my abilities began that day."

"Ed, is this a story about you?"

"Yeah, by the time I was ten I had to do all kinds of work. I got to changing engines on trucks and tractors. You know, by the time I was twelve I could do damn near anything. Just give me a wrench and I'd tear it apart. Torquein' 'em back together was a problem though. Especially when I didn't know what the specs were."

"Well, Ed, if I gave you a wrench, could you tear this sentence apart?"

"I thought that was your job.-"

"III did, would you be as proud of it as you were of puttin' that boot on the axle?"

"C'mon, we're not talking about a truck here. This here is work. Tearing engines apart is fun."

"Yeah, Ed, I'll bet it is. How about the first time? Was it fun?"

"Ah....let me think. Yeah, it was. Well, it started out fun, until Lyle, that's my step uncle, he chewed my butt real good. Shoot! It was his truck. I ended up with a handful of wires and nuts after it was all together. He made me tear it all down again. He told me since I had made the mess, it was my job to fix it. But you know, he helped me put it back together. That's where I learned about torque wrenches and keepin' track of all the parts. It's kinda fun to get them of clunkers rennin' right."

"You got a book on grammar, Ed?"

"Yeah, right here." A pair of pliers fell out and hit the floor as he pulled a dog-eared textbook from his bag.

"OK, let's see what it says about comma splices." We looked up compound sentences and spent a few minutes working our way through the concepts of independent clauses.

"I want you to tear this sentence apart just like you would a truck engine. When you've done

that, then we'll torque it back together. OK?"

"You're sure making it hard on me. Is this what tutorin' is all about?"

"Ed, I think you can fix this. When you've got it worked out, I'll get back with you."

"Shoot! You sure you don't know Lyle?"

I looked past his shoulder towards the door. A red-haired girl stood at the entrance. The invisible barrier kept her from entering. Written across her face was the message, "I need help."

"Can I help you?"

A smile emerged from her concern. She glided up to the table, pulled the bag from her shoulder, and began fumbling through her spiral notebook.

"Now, is this a comma splice?"

Ed looked up, gave me a knowing grin, eye-balled the girl, and went back to torque'n' his eraser.

William Perkins
Peer Tutor
Weber State College
Ogden, Utah

Journal of Teaching Writing

The Journal of Teaching Writing, now in its eighth year of publication, is a refereed journal for classroom teachers and researchers whose interest or emphasis is the teaching of writing. Appearing semiannually, in late spring and fall, JTW offers insightful articles on the theory, practice, and teaching of writing throughout the curriculum- from preschool to the university, from the science class- to the literature class. Each issue covers a range of topics, from composition theory and discourse analysis to curriculum development and innovative teaching techniques. The Editorial Board encourages submission of articles from educators on all levels and in all disciplines. Individual subscriptions are .00 a year (two issues) and institutional subscriptions are \$15.00 (ISSN 0735-1259). All inquiries should be addressed to JTW, IUPUI, 425 University

Goodland, Sinclair and Beverly Hirst. Peer Tutoring: A Guide to Learning by Teaching. New York Nichols Publishing (155 W. 72nd Street, New York, NY 10023), 1989. 184 pp., hardbound, \$28.50.

On the book's jacket the publisher's note states that it "describes specimen tutoring schemes, analyzes objectives, outlines research findings on the effectiveness of peer tutoring, indicates how tutoring can be developed in schools and in higher education, considers one major tutoring scheme in detail

and offers practical suggestions on how to set up a peer tutoring scheme....It will be a helpful source of practical ideas which hard-pressed professionals can adapt to their purposes in primary, secondary, or tertiary education; remedial education; industrial training; health education, or education of the mentally and physically handicapped."

The strengths and weaknesses of this book for those of us in writing labs are readily apparent from this jacket blurb: the book surveys a large amount of territory, albeit briefly, and is overly general in that it covers tutoring at all levels in a wide variety of settings. For more specific information about tutoring writing, you'll have to look elsewhere, but the book will broaden some horizons if you are interested in the wider world of tutoring. For example, the chapter on "What Uses Have Been Made of Peer Tutoring" describes tutoring programs in settings such as Israel's national program in which university students help socially disadvantaged children. Other pro-grams include tutors who are senior citizens, parents, and other non-student groups. In another chapter, the authors review educational theories underlying the use of peer tutoring and summarize research studies which measure the benefits of tutoring.

In sum, the book takes us outside the world of writing labs and learning centers to see peer tutors in a wider context of instruction. Equally important, while the book may not help you plan an agenda for next week's tutoring meeting, you'll find some helpful suggestions (based on research) for answers the next time you are asked about the success or effectiveness of peer tutoring as an instructional methodology. That alone should be worth the somewhat hefty price of this book.

Call for Proposals
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Cedarburg High School
Writing Center proposal offered
as a model

At Cedarburg High School in Wisconsin, Richard Cass (chairman) and members of the English Department have put together an impressive proposal for a writing lab. It includes an agenda, and sections on a justification, benefits, staffing, and budget, plus the center's newsletter, handouts, evaluation sheet, record keeping forms, and statistics. They've generously offered to mail out copies free of charge to any district or teacher who would benefit from seeing their proposal. Address all requests to Carol Hertz, Cedarburg High School, W68 N611 Evergreen Boulevard, Cedarburg, Wisconsin 53012.

A reader comments....

I have found the WLN to be one of my favorite publications on teaching/tutoring writing because of the practical articles and the human approach toward students reflected in them. As two of my colleagues and I (we teach basic and developmental composition and have all worked in our lab) sat at tables registering students for classes, we discussed the September 1989 issue of the newsletter, especially the article by Philip Morse.

Patsy Krech
Memphis, TN

A reader asks....

Dundalk Community College has been a longtime subscriber to the fine, enlightening Writing Lab Newsletter. Thus, a couple of weeks ago when our Writing Center was gifted with twelve IBM PC's and TTT 6300's, I, who have little background in computers, decided to turn to newsletter readers for assistance. In addition to the twelve PC's, we will be acquiring hard drives for each machine, at least one Word Perfect 5.0 and three printers.

I am interested in obtaining as much information as possible on other labs using similar equipment and on the software libraries such labs have built up.

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Correction

In the September, 1989 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter, authorship of the article "Seven Myth-Understandings about Writing Centers" was incorrectly attributed to both Rick Leahy and Roy Fox. However, Roy Fox writes that "the article should be credited only to Rick Leahy. Yup. It was all his. I'd like to take some credit for a good, solid article like that, but it's definitely his baby."



the TROUBLESHOOTER

-- Paula Gills

It's been a while since I've been able to have contact with the WLN readership, and I'm glad I now have the time to continue my articles about individuals with learning disabilities. Before I get into common writing problems and tutorial strategies, I'd like to present a brief list of sources that specifically address writing.

Alley, Gordon and Donald Deshler. Teaching The Learning Disabled Adolescent. Denver: Love Publishing, 1979.

Collins, Terrence and Lynda Price. "A Guide to Selecting Word Processing Software For LD College Writers." Computer-Assisted Composition Journal 1 (1986): 12-22. (Also in ERIC ED 267 412.)

Gregg, Noel. "A Comparison of the Written Language Mechanical Error Patterns of College LD, Normal and Basic Writers." ERIC ED.

Heller, Jack. Typing for People with Learning Disabilities. Teaching Institute for Special Education. 2947 Bayside Court, Wantagh, N.Y. 11793 (516 781-5115).

Johnson, Doris W. "Disorders of Written Language." Adults With Learning Disabilities. New York: Grune and Stratton, 1987.

Johnson, Stanley W. and Robert

C. Morasky. Learning Disabilities. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980.

MacArthur, CA and B. Shneiderman. "LD Students' Difficulties in Learning to Use a Word Processor: Implications for Instruction and Software Evaluation." Journal of Learning Disabilities 19.4 (1986).

Mercer, Cecil D. Students With Learning Disabilities 3rd ed. Columbus; Merrill, 1987.

Moulton, Jacqueline R and Mary Sterling Bader. "The Writing Process: A Powerful Approach for the Language Disabled Student." Annals Of Dyslexia. 35(1986): 161-73.

Mykiesust, Helmer. Development and Disorders of Written Language. Vol 1. Grune and Stratton, 1965. (considered one of the seminal works in the field)

O'Hearn, Carolyn. "Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer." College English 51(1989): 294-304.

Richard, Amy. "Writing Dysfunction: A Problem in College Composition Courses." ERIC ED 158 271.

Roit, Marsha L. and Robert G. McK-enzie. " Disorders of Written Communication: An Instructional

**Priority for LD Students." Journal
Of Learning Disabilities 8.5 (1985):
258-60.**

One of the more significant issues for students with learning disabilities (but one often overlooked in terms of its wide-ranging and profound impact) is psychological/emotional response. Theorists currently debate this aspect as a "chicken or egg" issue- that is, does the disability cause emotional adjustment problems or do these difficulties pre-exist to some degree before schooling begins and become exacerbated by school failure. Gerald Coles, in his provocative analysis of learning disabilities entitled *The Learning Mystique* (Fawcett Columbine, 1987), strongly suggests that learning disabilities are rarely neurological in origin; they are most likely a more functional problem with complex, myriad causes both familial and educational. Many theorists disagree, however, hypothesizing that neurological or psychobiological deficits exist in the LD population. The point to be made here is that assessment and diagnosis is not an exact science and many possibilities need to be explored before arriving at any conclusions about the cause, nature, function or treatment of the dysfunction.

There is, however, one aspect that is common to most students and that is writing problems with accompanying anxiety about performance tasks. Attitude often plays such a large part that instructors and tutors must spend most of a semester's work just dealing with anxiety and writer's block. Unfortunately, the public (and sometimes private) school system is not always able to provide the time and level of individualized response in a nurturing atmosphere to adequately prepare students for the demands of college-level writing. Students know this better than anyone, so they often do what comes naturally-they defend their security by sometimes exhibiting complex behaviors such as avoidance, intentional failure, feigned disinterest, hostility, agitation and depression. I'm not saying that all

students with learning disabilities are emotionally disturbed, but I am saying that, more often than not, emotional issues accompany the disability and must be successfully dealt with before real learning can take place; research on the impact of anxiety on learning points to this fact.

Other common problems that Alley and Deshler have cited and many of us, I'm sure, have observed are their inability to:

- Adequately state what they know and observe around them
- Express complex relationships such as cause/effect, analysis, comparison and sequence
- Hypothesize and create plans of action
- Express feelings, opinions and judgements
- Organize and sequence ideas
- Choose appropriate words
- Employ a variety of sentence patterns
- Use appropriate punctuation, capitalization and spelling, and monitor neatness
- Employ metacognitive strategies in revising and editing behaviors- (These students rarely have effective self-monitoring behaviors.)

I'll close for now, and in a future column I'll discuss practical solutions for some of these problems. In the meantime, if you have questions or comments, write or call.

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Serving the Disabled in the Writing Center

How do you judge the quality of a school or, more specifically, of a writing center? One way, I contend, is by looking at its services and accessibility for disabled students. Find a writing center that is committed to supporting students with learning or physical disabilities, and chances are you will find a center that is also conscientious, innovative, and warm.

Serving disabled students does require commitment- commitment of time, of mental energy, and yes, of money. Why make such a commitment, especially when writing centers must consider so many other priorities? One important reason is the fact that it's the law. If an institution receives federal funding, it must adhere to Public Law 94-142 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which mandate equal accessibility for qualified disabled students.

Another reason is the numbers game, which sadly enough, most of us must play. With a population in America approaching 36 million (according to the OHEW definition of "handicapped person"), the disabled community is one we would all be wise to recruit and serve. Perhaps you do not see many disabled students in your center now- not enough to warrant the extra effort to provide services and accessibility, you may think. On the contrary, a lack of numbers may simply reflect a lack of support. Increased support will equal in-creased numbers of disabled students, in terms of both recruitment and retention (those two magic words in any administrator's ear).

But the reason most writing centers make the commitment to serve disabled students does not hinge on legality or head counts; rather we serve simply because serve is what we're here to do, for all students. It's our underlying principle. One fringe benefit of providing such service is that we increase our visibility across campus by branching out and filling a need. We become even more indispensable than we already are. Hence, supporting disabled students is a way for writing centers to serve and survive.

One important step is to provide "sup-port services," sometimes called "accommoda-

tions." If your campus already has a Disabled Student Services Office, the Writing Center can coordinate its services with that office. (Many schools have a Disabled Student Services Office with one or more people working to provide and coordinate services for disabled students on campus. Check around-you just may have such an office that you never knew existed.) If no such office exists, the writing center can fill that void.

One accommodation is a reader/taping service. Writing lab tutors can read aloud or tape record tests, handouts, or even textbooks for a student who is dyslexic, blind, or mobility impaired and unable to hold a book or turn pages. The Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE) has published a *Volunteer Reader/Taping Service Handbook* with step-by-step suggestions for setting up such a service. (The address and phone number are AHSSPPE, P. O. Box 21192, Columbus, OH 43221, tel.: 614-488-4972.) Aside from providing readers for tests, the center can also facilitate other test accommodations such as extended time or computer access (for "in-class" writing).

Access to the writing center's computers can indeed be a boon to disabled students. Learning disabled students can manage their spelling deficit with a spell-check program. Ease of correction and revision make word processing especially suitable for a student whose eye-hand coordination precludes accurate typing. In some cases, a tutor may need to serve as a computer assistant, typing in text for a disabled writer. Directors may also want to check into special adaptations (hardware and software) that can make computer use accessible to visually impaired and physically disabled students. (Again, AHSSPPE would be an excellent source of more detailed information for those who are interested.)

A learning disabled, mobility impaired, or hearing impaired student can manage classroom notetaking if the center will distribute NCR duplication paper. With it, another student in class takes notes and then tears off the bottom (yellow) sheet for the disabled

student, who then has an immediate copy of notes from which to study. As much as possible, though, disabled students are often encouraged to take their own notes simultaneously to remain alert and not appear lazy.

Other unforeseen accommodations may challenge the innovative minds in the writing center. For example, a blind student might need a tactile map for geography class. That request might lead to a tutor's using some slack time to trace "glue rivers" onto a map.

One other vital support service involves fostering self-advocacy among disabled students. That is, disabled students must know their own strengths and weaknesses, and must be assertive enough to use that knowledge as the basis for seeking accommodations from other teachers. The writing center tutor can help by filling out a Student Data Sheet with each disabled student. This sheet, adapted from the book *Campus Access for Learning Disabled Students* (published by Closer Look), introduces the type of disability, explains individual strengths and weaknesses, and suggests suitable accommodations. The student can then use the completed sheet as a concrete way to open the lines of communication with each instructor, preferably at the start of each semester. (For a copy of this form and other appendix materials too numerous for the Newsletter, send a self-addressed envelope stamped with 25 cents postage to Cheryl Hofstetter Towns, School of Applied and Cont. Ed., Washburn University, Topeka, KS 66621.)

Invariably, the question arises, "But are all these 'special favors' fair to the other students?" The best answer is 'Yes.' Fairness is an individual matter. For a non-disabled student who writes within the normal range of speed, one hour may be a fair amount of time to allot for an exam. For a student whose writing speed is significantly impaired by an identified learning disability or physical impairment, two hours may be a fair amount.

Along with facilitating disabled student support services, writing centers must also consider their primary function- tutoring- in relation to disabled students. And the time to consider the special issue of tutoring disabled students is not four weeks into the semester when a deaf student is referred to the center for the first time. Prior tutor training is essential and should be incorporated into the regular

tutor training sessions.

Handbooks are available for training tutors of learning disabled students. AHSSPPE (see above) has published *Assisting College Students with Learning Disabilities: A Tutor's Manual*, and the Brooklyn Campus Task Force at Long Island University has compiled *Successful College Tutoring: Focusing on the Learning Disabled Student in the Learning Center*.

To supplement those manuals, I have compiled lists of strategies for serving students with specific disabilities: the mobility impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired, and learning disabled. While space does not permit me to include these four pages of specific, practical guidelines, I will gladly include them in the appendix materials, which readers can obtain by following the Instructions previously cited. These lists of strategies may be copied, distributed, and discussed at tutor training sessions. (I compiled the lists from my own experiences and reading. They are, therefore, by no means complete and unquestionable; I welcome suggested changes and additions from readers.)

If your campus has a Disabled Student Services Office, make use of its personnel for ideas, materials, and presentations during tutor training. Perhaps invite a disabled student (a former writing center patron?) to share his or her perceptions and suggestions with your staff.

The tutor training period is also the time to orient tutors to any equipment and/or policies related to accommodations for disabled students. (Where is the NCR paper? How do you use the large-print monitor? Where do we go to read a test to a student? What about confidentiality?) In addition, tutors should be oriented to other available support services such as counseling or the Disabled Student Services Office.

Most important, attitude should be the emphasis during tutor training, for attitude often acts as a barrier to true accessibility even when physical barriers have been removed. First, tutors should have the opportunity to discuss beforehand their concerns and their positive feelings about working with disabled students. Second, tutors must not view them-selves as "saviors" out to rescue "poor, help-less" disabled students. Disability does not

equal inability. A tutor's job is to tutor each disabled student as any other student, perhaps providing a few necessary accommodations and fostering independence as much as possible. Empower, don't rescue. Finally, tutors must discover that a student's disability is truly secondary. Indeed, the tutor who takes the time to get to know the disabled student as a person will discover just that, a person with interests and family and personality- a person who also, by the way, happens to be meeting the challenge of a disability. We must all learn to look beyond the disability to see what's really important: the person.

After the prior training, tutors can get further background as the need arises. Sources include the aforementioned Disabled Student Services Office and AHSSPPE, as well as another excellent resource: HEATH (Higher Education and Adult Training for people with Handicaps). Especially helpful are its free "fact sheets" and free Resource Directory of relevant agencies and organizations (six listed under "Learning Disabilities" alone). HEATH's toll-free number is 1-800-544-3284.

The most direct source, of course, is the student. Tutors should be straight-forward and say, "Hey, you know better than I do how you manage best; just let me know. And feel free to ask me for support or to set me straight whenever you want."

At a recent conference, Richard Harris, Director of Disabled Student Services at Ball State, reminded the non-disabled members of the audience that we are all merely TABs: Temporarily Able-Bodied. Indeed, "disabled" is one minority group that each of us could join at any time. Maybe now is the time to work seriously for physical, pedagogic, and attitudinal accessibility in our writing centers.

Cheryl Hofstetter Towns
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WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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