



# WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. III, No. 4(December, 1978)

Two requests for help which I frequently receive, requests for information on starting new labs and requests for back issues of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, suggest services which could be offered by some members of our newsletter group:

1. A resource person who could compile a list of suggested sources of information on starting a lab and would then be willing to keep this list up-to-date and to mail it to anyone who is interested. The list might include a bibliography of useful articles, a file of names of newsletter members who would be willing to act as consultants, notices of meetings where papers on labs will be presented, etc.
2. Someone who would have a complete file of copies of back issues of the newsletter and would be willing to mail copies on request. I presume that the person willing to undertake the job would set some fee to cover costs.

If you are interested in taking on either of these responsibilities, please contact me.

In the meantime, have a very pleasant holiday season and a restful vacation, and keep sending your articles, names of new members, and \$2 donations to help defray duplicating and mailing costs (with checks made payable to me) to:

Muriel Harris, Editor  
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER  
Department of English  
Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN 47907

## UNNECESSARY HANGUPS

Along with lasting memories of fine people dedicated to important tasks, I carried away from the 1978 4C's meeting in Denver lingering impressions that many lab personnel have unfortunate negative attitudes toward: 1) the use of machines, and 2) the use of commercial program materials. While a healthy skepticism is needed in these areas, unrealistic negativism can stymie progress in lab development.

At the outset, we probably all agree that one-on-one tutoring with a piece of writing in hand, followed up with assignments in locally prepared materials, is the best way to improve a student's competency. The problem is that most of us simply cannot afford this ideal situation. Favorable combinations of grant money, increased staff, released time are just not often available in sufficient quantities to handle the many students who need help.

At Michigan Tech we put these students on guided self-study, giving them as much one-on-one as we can. Some of this must be in-the-flesh tutoring, but we also utilize "self-controlled audio/visual aids" (machines). In effect, we have 40 surrogate tutors who, while they may frighten some instructors, have proven to be quite effective with many students. These "tutors" are willing to work full-time (24 hours a day if need be), are all paid for, and are more reliable in their areas of expertise than many instructors are. They will patiently explain comma faults all day without getting testy, and without submitting to charm or sexual attraction (at least I don't think so).

For those academic Luddites who are afraid the machines will take their jobs--relax. It's a question of who is to be master. The machines are just another A/V aid; they can-



not replace the classroom teacher any more than blackboard and chalk can. Granted, there are some administrators who would like to have it so. Our profession has resisted this notion forcefully and will continue to do so, but we had better get the machines and techniques under our control, or less circumspect individuals will decide that the millennium is here and English teachers are to get their just desserts.

So, while we may thank the naysayers, occasionally, for reminding us of the ideal, we should not hesitate to attack the actual problems we face with what resources are available to us. The machines are available for modest sums, are continually improving in quality, and have proven their effectiveness.

Some of the above comments apply also to commercial program materials. It is fashionable to give blanket condemnation to all commercial lab materials (except one's own commercial ventures). Ideally, again, given the talent, local creation of materials is best. But how often do we have the money and time? If we do have the talent, money, and time, and are successful, then very likely we can find a publisher. Only to have our materials condemned as "commercial." It seems odd that we should automatically condemn the fruitful results of our fellow laborers in the pits.

There are, of course, materials on the market that should never have been published; there are others that are so superficial as to be outdated almost immediately, and others that are hopelessly tradition bound. But with careful checking and selecting, there are materials available that will do the job. They can usually be edited and adapted to the local situation, and, as with the machines, they are improving each year.

We should continue to lobby for the ideal, but in the meantime, back at the lab, machines and commercial materials can help meet the actual challenges we face.

Richard Mason  
Michigan Technological University

---

Dear Readers:

Early in October I called Muriel Harris seeking emergency aid: I had just been appointed coordinator of a writing lab-to-be, and I had one week to think up a program and get it approved so that it could be sent to

Washington before the deadline. I will pass over the grim details of that week and the one following (we received a few days' extension). A plan was offered to and accepted by the English faculty and was sent to Washington. We now have the task of carrying out that plan; therefore, if there is any newsletter reader who recognizes from the description below some or all of his own experiences, I'd appreciate hearing who he is. As Lincoln moves into its year of development, I'll be seeking your advice.

Lincoln University has a student population of approximately 60% white, 35% black, and 5% foreign. We have a large number of rural students from the surrounding farm communities and a large number of urban students from St. Louis and Kansas City. Just under 50% of our incoming freshmen place in remedial English, and besides the usual communication problems that most freshmen bring with them, our population has its own special ones.

Lincoln has struggled to keep its composition classes at 25 students despite Missouri's credit-generation policy which makes larger sections of courses financially beneficial to a school. We have a small staff of 9 full-time English teachers and a department head with a 3/4 time teaching load to carry 9 sections of remedial English, 13 sections of regular comp, 7 sections of sophomore literature, and the courses for major and minors.

To help us meet this situation the Office of Education has awarded Lincoln an AIDP grant. From it English gets a full-time permanent tutor and the money to develop a writing lab and to train personnel in techniques. We cannot add staff even during the development period, since we must carry out our plan without federal money after the grant period ends. Therefore, the English faculty has come up with the following plan to help students without increasing cost or faculty load.

1. We will design and construct a room to provide a writing environment (classroom-lab) in which all sections of remedial English will meet. The lab will also serve referrals and drop-ins from regular comp classes.

2. Remedial English classes will have four contact hours; two with instructor, one with instructor and tutor, and one with only the tutor.

3. The lab will be in full operation by August 1979.

4. One English teacher (me) will be given released time next spring, summer, and fall to design the lab, coordinate all activities, create modules, and train the rest of the faculty in methods and materials.

5. The grant goal is the rather incredible one of assuring that 84% of Lincoln's incoming freshmen enroll as sophomores the next year.

Right now I am filling out federal schedules, ordering equipment, and planning (without released time, of course) in the effort to meet all deadlines and get the project started. If anybody out there has had experiences which parallel the situation that we at Lincoln are now in, we would appreciate hearing from you and receiving any general suggestions you would care to make. By the time your responses are in, we should have a clearer idea of what must be done here and then I can contact you for specific answers and advice. Perhaps we can even give advice to some of you; I have heard that baptism by fire is unusually productive.

Donna M. Grout  
Dept. of Humanistic Studies  
Lincoln University  
Jefferson City, MO 65101



### THREE SOURCES FOR WRITING LAB TUTORS

As is perhaps the case with most writing labs, ours in the Language Arts Department at Cameron University has a constant need for tutors. Two sources for our tutors are probably familiar to some readers of Writing Lab Newsletter. A third may very well represent a hidden gold mine for all of us.

One area is the department's course in the methods of teaching English. Students in the course tutor during peak morning hours of lab usage, each for one hour per week. During a recent evaluation of the lab experience, the methods students indicated that their tutoring was valuable in preparing for teaching. Although methods students require much attention; unfortunately, beginning with the new academic year, the methods course will be offered only during the spring semester. To overcome the anticipated dearth of tutors, we had to locate some from other areas.

The department recently gained additional work study funds for students to tutor in

the lab. During the 1978 4C's meeting in Denver there were many papers telling about the successful use of undergraduates as writing lab tutors. In my report on the conference I noted the use of students as tutors and our department chairperson requested and received added work study funds for faculty-recommended student tutors. So far we have been very fortunate and have benefitted from the referral process.

The third source for tutors which I shall mention is one which I suspect not many labs are presently using. At Cameron University our Veterans Affairs office keeps a referral list of persons, most with bachelor's degrees, who are approved for tutoring by the Language Arts department. A veteran attending school on the G.I. Bill and the spouse and children of a disabled veteran are entitled to use a tutor for up to thirteen hours per month for a total of thirteen months throughout a four-year program. At our institution, veterans' funds, which pay tutors five dollars an hour, have not been used as much as they could be since students are not always certain of their eligibility and because there has not yet been an active referral campaign.

However, in the future the lab staff will organize workshops to take place at the beginning of each semester for VA and other tutors and we will extend our facility to them. We intend to encourage them to use our record keeping methods and materials so that we can draw upon the data which their efforts generate. We hope to be able to account for their activities in terms of the overall effort (which includes a credit course in basic English as well as the Writing Lab) in dealing with students having basic writing problems.

There are many sources for tutors other than the ones I have indicated. However, the ones mentioned are attractive insofar as they involve little or no cost, require no new funding requests, and, in the case of the last two mentioned, tie into existing federal funding sources. In helping as many students as our lab does each year, I am sure that there are not many other ways the federal dollar can be better spent. For those of you who are trying to locate tutors, you might want to write us in order to learn more about the details of our experiences.

Leigh Howard Holmes  
Language Arts Department  
Cameron University  
Lawton, Oklahoma 73505



I have a project going that I think will interest writing lab personnel.

Drawing on my interest and "expertise" (is anyone ever an "expert"?) in usage instruction over the last several years, I have composed a list of criteria by which to judge effective instruction in points of nonstandard usage. Now a graduate student and I are examining the dozens and dozens of handbooks, workbooks, mediated items, etc., whose main purpose is to teach standard grammar and mechanics; our purpose is simply to identify the most effective instructional materials.

We found, for example, that virtually no one in the past several years has addressed, in print, the problem of what works, and why, in usage instruction--that most of the commercial stuff has quite limited value; yet among it all, there are some gems, especially when it comes to teaching the quite specific stuff like points of standard usage.

I think our findings would be of interest to the lab people, and to composition people in general. Also, we expect a great amount of valuable feedback from teachers.

Listed below is an outline of what we would cover:

Topic: Effective Instruction in Standard Grammar and Mechanics

Main questions addressed:

1. What constitutes effective instruction in points of standard grammar and mechanics?
2. What are the best commercially prepared materials available to teach standard usage?

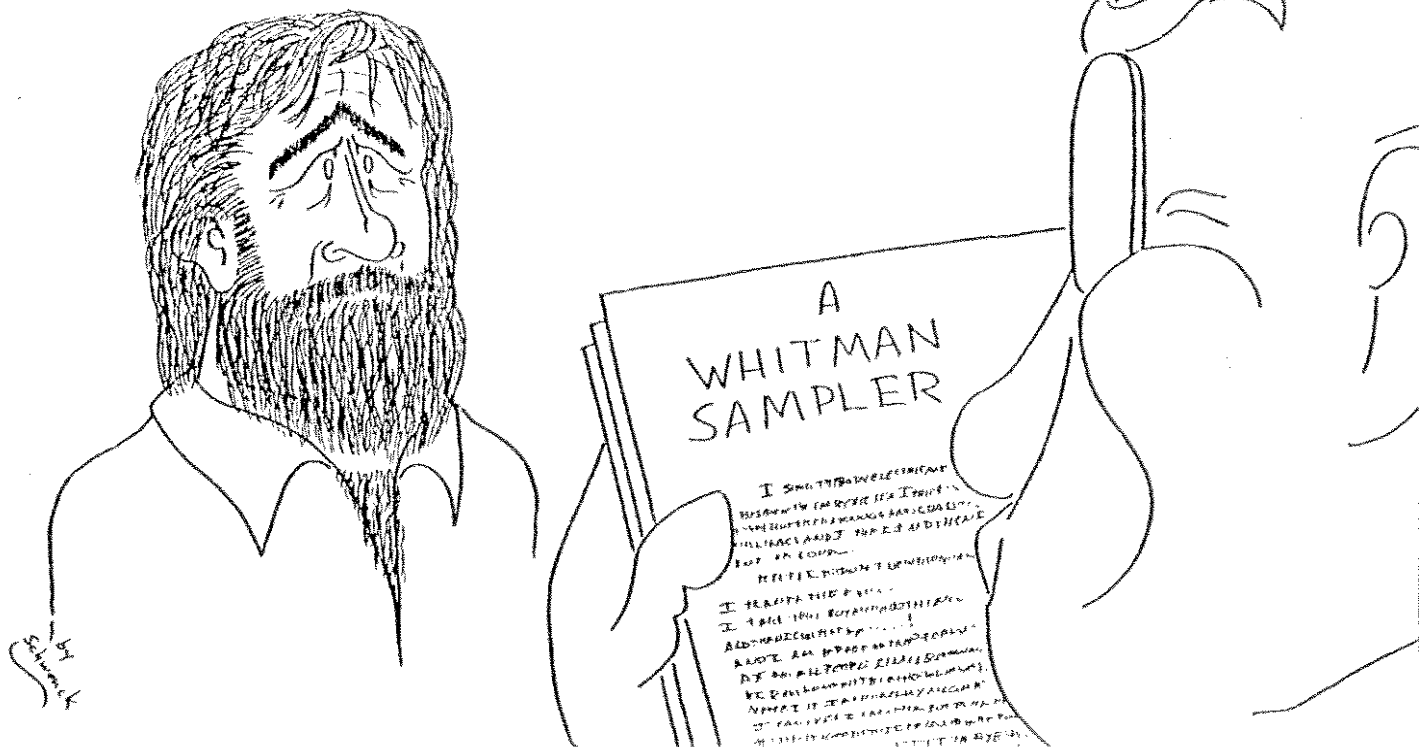
Outline of remarks:

1. Introduction to the problem of effective instruction in the conventions of edited written English.
2. Criteria for judging effective usage exercises.
3. Description of our survey:
  - location of several dozens of usage exercises: handbooks, workbooks, mediated materials, programmed instruction, etc.
  - rating procedure
4. Findings
5. Recommendations
6. Invitation for questions, comments, suggestions, etc.

Don Norton, Writing Lab  
Brigham Young University

GREAT MOMENTS  
IN WRITING LAB  
HISTORY, #8

MR. WHITMAN ~ YOU REALLY MUST STOP  
OVERUSING THE FIRST PERSON  
SINGULAR PRONOUN!



## WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST-Supplement #16

Birnie, Billy F.  
Miami Southridge Senior High School  
19355 Southwest 114 Avenue  
Miami, Florida 33157

Brand, Alice  
252 Grant Avenue  
Highland Park, N. J. 08904

Campbell, Debra  
Department of English  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, W. Va. 26506

Corbin, John  
Kalamazoo Valley Community College  
6767 West O Avenue  
Kalamazoo, Mich. 49009

Fencl, Shirley  
2025 Granada Drive  
Florissant, Mo. 63033

Gallo, Donald  
English Department  
Central Connecticut State College  
1615 Stanley Street  
New Britain, Conn. 06050

Gilmer, Walker  
Department of English  
DePauw University  
Greencastle, IN 46135

Goldenberg, Myrna  
new address: 9328 Garden Court  
Potomac, MD 20854

Grout, Donna  
Department of Humanistic Studies  
Lincoln University  
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Harper, Ron  
Department of English  
Jeffrey City Schools  
Jeffrey City, Wyoming 82310

Harpster, L./Special Services  
Northern Kentucky University  
Central Receiving  
Highland Heights, KY 41076

Holt, Margaret-Rose  
Writing Workshop  
Kansas Newman College  
3100 McCormick Avenue  
Wichita, Kansas 67213

Jewell, Jeanne O.  
145 Stockton Road  
Bryn Mawr, Pa. 19010

Johnson, Jeff  
Department of English  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, W. Va. 26506

Katz, Norman  
Weston High School  
444 Wellesley Street  
Weston, Mass. 02193

Kula, Lavina  
Department of English  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, W. Va. 26506

Library/Buermann  
Cottage Grove H.S.  
1000 Taylor Avenue  
Cottage Grove, Oregon 97424

Mason, Greg  
Department of English  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, W. Va. 26506

Meyer, Margaret  
College of Lake County  
19351 W. Washington Street  
Grayslake, Ill. 60030

Stroud, Oxford  
Department of English  
Auburn University  
Auburn, Alabama 36830

Taube, Eva  
new address: 4464 Castelar Street  
#204  
San Diego, Ca. 92107

(Due to space limitations, the rest of this month's list will appear next month.)

A complete mailing list can be obtained from:

Helen Naugle  
Department of English  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Atlanta, Ga. 30332

