# WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

### ....from the editor....

By now, the first flurry of a new academic year should be subsiding. But why all that initial frenzy? Perhaps it is because we have so many tasks to attend to simultaneously: scheduling re-turning staffs, training new tutors, organizing materials, introducing our services to the teachers who'll be sending us their students, and getting the word out to students that we're here and ready to help. One writing lab director compares this effort to that of a symphony conductor-setting everything in motion har-moniously.

But it is also the variety and diversity of what we do every day that keeps us dashing around, forgetting where we left that last half-full cup of coffee. And variety is the common note among the articles in this month's issue of the newsletter: the variety of services one writing lab offers, the different approaches to working with English-as-a-second-language students another lab uses, and the diversity of techniques for proofreading in yet an-other lab . I hope these articles prove to be useful. And I hope you find your coffee cup.

Muriel Harris, editor

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### The writing center at Troy State University: A multi-service learning center

The Troy State Writing Center. which opened in 1982, has as its main objective to pro-vide assistance to the student who needs help in removing deficiencies in writing. improving English language skills, and overcoming affective barriers that limit potential for success.

Heading Writing Center activities is the director who supervises the activities of the Writing Center instructor/coordinator and the coordinator of writing-across-the-curriculum. Among the duties of the Writing Center instructor are training and supervising tutors, developing support material for developmental English, preparing workshop materials for the writing-acrossthe-curriculum program, maintaining the tutorial services of the Center, preparing reports as necessary, and carrying out any other duties which might be necessary for the successful implementation of the English component of the developmental education pro-

gram. The primary duties of the writing-acrossthe-curriculum coordinator include- but are not limited to- the following: planning WAC program activities, coordinating WAC workshops and follow-up sessions, and acting as resource person for faculty participating in WAC programs.

The Writing Center offers a multiplicity of programs. Services provided by the Center include the tutorial programs for English. English as a second language, English language proficiency testing, developmental laboratories, and speech improvement. Moreover, the Center houses a professional library and is the base for the writing-across-the-curriculum program. Considering the needs of students as individual learners, the Center offers a variety of instructional modes and materials. Because the Center's primary function is to offer tutorial assistance, its major program is the tutor training program.

## tutor training program

Peer tutors are an Integral part of the Center and crucial to the success of the Center; therefore, tutors are carefully selected and extensively trained. Applicants must have at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average, must have completed freshman composition courses with a "B" or better, must successfully complete a diagnostic test and writing sample, and must be committed to the goals and objectives of the Writing Center. All new tutors are required to complete a minimum of two weeks of training before they are allowed to work with students. The tutor training program involves four basic steps: 1) studying the tutor training manual, 2) interacting with a computer video training program, 3) reviewing instructional materials, and 4) attending staff meetings. The tutor training manual contains an explanation of the Center's philosophy and purpose, a description of tutorial programs, outline of Writing Center procedures, lists of instructional materials available, and helpful handouts. Used in conjunction with the training manual, the interactive computer video programs require that a tutor closely observe several different scenes and respond to specific questions regarding procedure. Although tutors complete sixteen to twenty hours of training initially, tutor training is ongoing. Throughout the quarter tutors meet ( individually and in small groups) with the Writing Center coordinator to discuss problems, report progress, and seek advice; attend weekly staff meetings; continue to review instructional materials, keep journals, and complete special projects

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as assigned. Presently the Writing Center instructor and director are in the process of planning a tutor training course to begin the spring quarter of 1989.

## services

1. English Tutorial Program.

The English Tutorial Program provides assistance to any TSU student who is having problems with written expression. In addition, the Center provides assistance to students who need help in preparing for English components of standardized tests. Students maywalk in on their own or be referred by an instructor. The Center makes available to the student a variety of methods of instruction including the following: one-to-one tutorials, small-group instruction, workshops, learning modules, audio visual, and computer assisted instruction.

2. English as a Second Language

Although foreign students enrolled in English courses are helped under the English Tutorial Program, the Center also provides assistance to ESL students based on their individual needs. In addition to providing one-to-one conversational English sessions, the Center has a number of programs designed to address some of those language problems most often encountered by the

foreign student, namely grammar, word usage, and fluency.

### 3. Developmental Labs

All students in developmental English courses, English 090 and English 091, must attend two sessions per week at the Writing Center. In the lab, students work with tutors in small groups. When additional work is required, students work through learning modules, computer programs, and other appropriate instructional materials. Students in the 090 labs work on sentence structure: English 091 students work on paragraph development. Students' progress is monitored and reports are periodically sent to classroom instructors. At the end of each quarter, students in the developmental English courses complete questionnaires evaluating the Center's effectiveness. Lab programs are adjusted quarterly.

### 4. English Language Proficiency Test Preparation

Many students who are preparing to take the English Language Proficiency Test for entry into the School of Education seek assistance at the Writing Center. A student working through the ELPT Program follows sequential steps which lead to mastery of four basic objectives: 1) a review of grammar and usage. 2) practice in formulating and organizing an effective essay, 3) introduction to college-level vocabulary, and 4) suggestions on how to test well under pressure.

### 5. Speech Improvement

Available for students experiencing difficulties with spoken English is the Center's speech improvement program. Basically, this activity requires that students listen to a model tape of an articulation drill developed by a speech instructor at the University and then record and critique their own reading of the drill. The goals of the program are twofold: That students will become more aware of correct pronunciation in their lives and that students will improve their own speech practices.

### 6. Testing

Writing Center staff are responsible for administering the English Placement Test and work cooperatively with the English Department in the placement of students in English 090, 091, and 101. As members of the Developmental English Committee, Writing Center instructors also serve as readers for the final examination in English 091, On file at the Center are unit tests and final examinations for both developmental English courses.

### 7. Workshops

The Center regularly offers workshops on a variety of topics. Some of the workshops are generated by the Writing Center, others by TSU faculty. Some workshops relating to writingacross-the-curriculum that are available at the Center include instructions on how to write book reviews, critiques, position papers, grant or job proposals, annotated bibliographies, proposals. progress reports, abstracts, syntheses, memoranda, and various documentation systems.

### professional library

The Center's professional library has over one hundred reference books and many journal articles on writing theory, developmental education, tutor training, and writing-across-the-curriculum. The library is available to TSU faculty, administrators, staff, and tutors. Many of the books in the Center's library are listed on major current bibliographies relating to writing theory
and developmental education.

### instructional materials and equipment

### 1. Learning Modules

Designed by Writing Center personnel, thirty-five learning modules covering sentence structure, sentence errors, parts of speech, punctuation, and paragraph development are catalogued in the center, Most students are able to work through the modules independently; how-ever, some students require assistance from tutors.

### 2. Audits-Visual Programs

Audio-visual instruction is another mode of instruction available to students. Center instructors have found the programs to be quite helpful in reinforcing classroom instruction, introducing students to new material, reviewing for self-enrichment, working with ESL students, and conducting workshops.

### 3. Computer Assisted Instruction

The newest, most popular and innovative method of instruction utilized in the Center is computer-assisted instruction. Although the Center has purchased a variety of computer soft-ware programs, those developed by the Center for students at Troy State are quite effective in helping students to Improve their basic writing skills.

Some programs are interactive video computer programs. The grammar programs with audio (for VCR with VHS) are useful for reading-impaired, blind, and ESL students.

4. Handouts, Workbooks, and Textbooks.

A variety of handouts on grammar, usage, and composition skills are on file in the Center. Some students who do not have the time to stay for a tutoring session will often take worksheets home to complete and return the next day to have them checked. The Writing Center has, in addition to textbooks for each composition course offered by the English Department, a number of handbooks, style manuals, programmed texts, and workbooks to supplement classroom instruction.

### writing across the curriculum

The Writing Center offers support to faculty participating in the WAC program by working with students individually and by offering to students workshops on various kinds of writing assignments required by teachers.

That the Writing Center has made a positive impact on the campus after six years of operation is evident in research data on the Center's effectiveness and in statistics on student usage. To date, over 15,000 visits to the Center have been recorded.

> Eleanor Lee
> Troy State University Troy,
> Alabama

### What's in a name?

I have been involved in the research, development, and operation of the Burlington Community High School " Communication Resource Center." called "The Write Place," for over six years, and I (and a growing number of others) am convinced that our center is a most valuable addition to our curriculum. Our center operates with three major goals and objectives: 1) to provide remediation, reinforcement, and enrichment in all communication skills to students on a request or

referral basis, 2) to provide introduction to and remediation, reinforcement, and enrichment in all communication skills in all classes, 3) to become the basis for the exploration, development, and sharing of writing-for-learning activities. We have been most successful in the area of goal #1, and while I believe this is a vital component of any learn/writing center. I am frustrated and disappointed that we can not and do not have more content area instructors <u>utilizing</u> the services by referring students to us for assistance, by involving us in writing activities in their class-rooms, and in exploring writing-for-learning activities. Our efforts have attracted much alien-

> *Despite our best efforts at encouraging all instructors and all students to utilize our services, any name which stresses "writing" may be negating our efforts.*

Lion, and we are constantly providing information and in-service activities to others. In our on-going assessment of our efforts in the center and in the info illation we provide to others, we have spent much time in trying to improve our efforts in goals #2 and #3.

I am convinced that writing is far more valuable for most students as a means of improving

thinking than as a separate means of communication, and thus the more meaningful writing students do. the more the quality of their education will improve. Also, the more that all instructors use writing, the more valuable a learning/writing center becomes. All instructors must be made aware of the great value of writing-forlearning activities and of the great value that a learning/writing center can have in helping them provide the highest quality education.

Part of the blame for this "un-use" of the center lies in the fear and confusion that many content area instructors have about writing-forlearning activities, but we too are at fault in that we have repeatedly emphasized our efforts as writing labs or writing centers, i.e. The Write Place. We have unintentionally, at least in the eyes of many non-language arts instructors and of many students, tacitly excluded them from seeking the services that learning/writing centers should offer. Despite our best efforts at encouraging all

## Imitation and explanation

A common problem for writing center tutors is that often, without having special training or expertise, we must work with students who have special needs. One example of this occurs with tutors and ESL clients. As Judith Oster points out in "The ESL Composition Course and the Idea of a University," tutors "are expected to teach organization, rhetorical skills, graceful style, and argumentation to students most of whom have never learned these skills even in their native languages" (66). Just as there is no universally successful technique for teaching native speakers to write, there is no single technique which works for all ESL students.

As a new writing center tutor dealing with ESL clients who have reached an intermediate level of study in English, I have discovered that a combination of reformulation, controlled composition, and traditional drill techniques is a remarkably helpful solution, and I recommend it to those facing similar tutoring problems. I will first discuss three traditional techniques, then de-scribe my method which combines all three with the addition of constant dialogue between tutor and client, and conclude with an evaluation of the progress of three students with whom I used this method.

### reformulation

Andrew Cohen's articles on reformulation involve native speakers rewriting an ESL student's essay. The native speaker makes vocabulary as well as sentence structure changes while preserving the student's meaning as faith-fully as possible so that the student can analyze the changes. A distinct advantage of this technique, according to Cohen ("Reformulating Compositions"), is that "many language teachers do not have or do not take the time to suggest alternatives for even a few of the student's inappropriate lexical choices," and reformulation "at least provides them with an opportunity to see what mastery might look like" (1).

Ann Johns points out in "The ESL Stu-dent and the Revision Process" that "it is important to focus upon the generation of meaning before the imposition of structure" (73). The assumption here is that students focus upon the meaning that they are trying to communicate in their original drafts. Dialogue between the tutor and the student confirms this. Once the meaning

is clear, the student and tutor are able to address the structure of the message in the reformulation. Reformulation is a helpful form of feedback for ESL students who are able to see their own work enhanced by a nativespeaker.

Critical responses to Cohen's work offer certain reservations about reformulation. Naturally, the tutor must be skilled in order to avoid an incorrectly reformulated piece. Further, reformulation must include dialogue between the student and tutor for several reasons. Obviously, there are inevitable problems trying to remain true to the student's meaning, Most important, perhaps, is the question of how much of this information remains with the student for his next composition. I have found that reformulation is particularly helpful if we view it as a supplemental technique to be used in conjunction with controlled composition and traditional drill.

### controlled composition

The theory of controlled composition also focuses upon imitation with some explanation, and the dialogue between tutor and student elevates the copying process from mechanical imitation to thoughtful revision. Exercises such as those found in the Comp Lab Exercises series by Mary Epes, Carolyn Kirkpatrick, and Michael Southwell (Prentice Hall) are particularly helpful. Although ESL students are frequently skilled at completing grammar exercises accurately, their original compositions usually contain these same errors. For example, some ESL students are adept at spotting verb tense or vocabulary problems in error-filled exercises but are unable to make the connection between the exercises and their own compositions, Therefore, exposure to well-written native revisions certainly reinforces writing skills more positively than exposure to error-filled sentences.

Wilga Rivers notes in Teaching Foreign Language Skills that "careful copying helps to overcome the interference of native-language habits by focusing the student's attention on the differences" (246). One advantage of controlled composition exercises is that the tutoring session focuses upon one writing problem at a time which is sometimes less overwhelming for the student than focusing on every error at once. However, since exercises such as those designed by Epes,

Kirkpatrick, and Southwell build upon one an-other, they cannot be effectively used in one session. For instance, in the Comp Lab Exercises series, there are two modules covering "to be" verbs. The completion of these exercises alone far exceeds the limitations of one half-hour tutoring session.

### traditional drill

When used in conjunction with reformulation and controlled composition, traditional drill exercises can also be helpful. The indispensable addition to such exercises is explanatory dialogue between the tutor and student in which it is more important for the student to demonstrate an understanding of the underlying concept than to supply correct answers. It is important for students to understand their mistakes in order to avoid the same errors in a slightly different con-text. At this point, the revisions are reinforced by the imitation or copying process. In addition, copying his or her own ideas rephrased in native English allows the student to see choices made by a native who has an intuitive sense of sentence structure.

### combining all three with dialogue

My method involves a combination of all three techniques. First. I ask students to bring in a paragraph about a topic of particular interest to them which i read and attempt to discuss with them. Because our tutoring sessions are only thirty minutes long and we must overcome significant language barriers, we make little progress in one session. Throughout the entire tutoring session, the student and I are in constant dialogue which allows the student to supplement his or her ability to communicate in writing with his or her ability to communicate orally, If we are unable to make much progress verbally, I copy the student's paragraph in my own idiomatic English and, depending on the time remaining in the session, ask the student to point out each change that I have made in the revision. The student describes these changes, and together we devise rules for the revisions.

Often, ESL students overlook subtle changes such as capital letters or the addition of an article, and I must initiate the discussion of such revisions. In the beginning of the term, I find that this process requires a great deal of tutor intervention and prompting. However. as the

student progresses, his or her role in the explanation process becomes dominant.

This method should not be used as a sole teaching device for intermediate or advanced ESL students because they will begin to rely upon the skills of the native speaker rather than their own. Students should write compositions on assigned topics which will not be revised by a native speaker so that they can begin to spot their own grammatical errors and content problems. My focus is upon meaning- not mechanics. After all, if the student has not conveyed his or her intended meaning, then the correction of grammatical errors and other syntax problems does little to enlighten the student's perspective on writing as a whole. What the student intended to convey in the original draft has already been dealt with in dialogue between the tutor and student. The reformulation at-tempts to structurally enhance the original draft which has been supplemented by the student's verbal explanations. If progress is to be made in writing centers with ESL clients who have less than proficient verbal skills, it is necessary to use some method more creatively.

I utilized this method of imitation and explanation consistently with three ESL students from different English courses whom I saw for half-hour sessions once or twice a week, depending upon their course requirements, for approximately ten weeks. I encouraged these students to write a paragraph on a topic of real interest to them after making it clear that their work in the writing center would not be graded. My experience in the writing center has shown me that ESL students are often anxious about their tutoring sessions, and frequently, all or part of their teacher's explanations of what the writing center is and what it can offer them has gone right over their heads.

The three students that I chose to study shared important characteristics. All three had reached an intermediate level of study in English. They were highly self-motivated to improve their writing skill, and they all appeared promptly and consistently for our tutoring sessions. Most importantly, all three of these students were pleased to see their own ideas expressed in native English. The first student that I will discuss had relatively equal verbal and writing skills. My second student had better verbal skills than writing skills, and my third student had poor verbal skills but adequate writing skills.

Of these three ESL students, Rosie, a

Colombian student, possessed the most advanced verbal and writing skills, but I had the least success utilizing this technique with her because her English vocabulary and grammar allowed her to simply avoid using words or constructions of which she was unsure. It is common for ESL students to construct sentences in ways that they are sure are "correct" rather than risk constructions which they are unsure of. In this way, the student appears more proficient than he or she really is. Rosie's mistakes were usually careless errors such as spelling mistakes, poor word choice, or incorrect verb tense.

When questioned, Rosie was always quick to demonstrate an understanding of revisions by offering an example of a similar error and an appropriate correction. I finally determined that Rosie enjoyed the exchange of explanations and conversation and did not strive to create exceptional, error-free writing as my other students did because she was confident that we would revise it together. For Rosie, I decided that my method was not challenging enough and abandoned it altogether.

My second student was y , a Japanese woman. Amy was particularly intrigued with the recopying. She painstakingly reproduced the revised draft, and yet, she consistently made errors in copying. This provided an opportunity for us to discuss these problems. Often these errors were superficial- the failure to capitalize the personal pronoun "I", for example- and Amy copied them Incorrectly because she never fully understood the concept or rule. For Amy, the physical reproduction was much more difficult than the incorporation of ideas. This method also forced Amy to master clauses which she rather skillfully avoided in most of her compositions.

My third student was a Cambodian whom I will call Kim. Just three years ago, Kim was living in a refugee camp on the Cambodian border. He and other refugees learned English from another Cambodian while hiding behind barrels in the camp. They had no paper, and they could not speak aloud without fear of reprisals from the guards. Naturally, Kim's verbal skills lagged far behind his writing skills. I worked with Kim for one full quarter, about ten weeks, with little progress. Our verbal communication was so slow that our sessions were never long enough to address all the problems in even one of Kim's paragraphs. During those ten weeks, I was not able to get even a short, original essay from Kim. That is when I decided to use my new method.

When I explained to him what I wanted to try, Kim was obviously relieved and excited by the prospect of having his sentences revised. Kim produced the longest and most well-developed essay he had ever written on life in the refugee camp. Some passages comparing his captivity to that of a caged bird are almost lyrical.

After I recopied the first paragraph, Kim noted the changes, and we discussed reasons for them. Kim's meaning was clear in his essay; nevertheless, there were the usual grammatical, vocabulary, and idiomatic problems. By the time we reached his conclusion, Kim was actually taking the pencil from me to edit his own work. Because of the limited time in our tutoring session. I recopied only the first paragraph of Kim's essay. The rest of the essay was revised by Kim outside of the writing center. For Kim, this method provided the security he needed to overcome his own writing inhibitions.

The biggest criticism of methods such as the one I propose is that tutors will change the meaning of the student's written work. However, the safeguard against this is the constant dialogue between the tutor and the student to decipher what the student means if it is not clearly expressed in the student's writing. I ceased worrying about inadvertently changing the meaning of the student's piece when I discovered that all three of my students delighted in correcting my misinterpretations.

As Elizabeth Taylor Tricomi emphasizes in "Krashen's Second-Language Acquisition Theory and the Teaching of Edited American English," "second-language students acquire language competence by exposure to language that is both understandable and meaningful to them. By concentrating on meaning. they subconsciously acquire form" (60). This combination of reformulation, controlled composition. and traditional drill techniques offers ESL students at an inter-mediate level the opportunity to incorporate some of the best suggestions of scholars in the field. The combination of theories allows tutors the freedom to tailor teaching techniques to the needs of the individual student.

Melinda Rainey Thompson
University of Alabama at Birmingham

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## What's in a name?

instructors and all students to u t o u r services, any name which stresses "writing" may be negating our efforts.

A writing center which supplements a writing program is better than no writing center at all, but for those centers which function to supplement all writing in all classes, a name is a minor but important consideration. If learning/writing centers are to be most beneficial, we must make sure that all of our efforts, including the name of our center, are as positive and encouraging as possible. A rose by another name may be as sweet, but a learning/writing center by another name may be more utilized and valuable.

Jim Upton
Burlington Community High School
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[Ed. Note: The Write Place has developed a packet of handouts which provides specific ideas, activities, and writing topics for writing-for-learning in other areas of study. Included are handouts listing topics for art, business, education, driver education, foreign language, home economics, industrial arts, language arts, mathematics, physical education, science, social science, and special services. For further information, contact Jim Upton, Burlington High School, 421 Terrace Drive, Burlington, Iowa 526011

## NCTE achievement awards in writing

To encourage high school students in their writing and to recognize publicly some of the best student writers In the nation, the National Council of Teachers of English will give achievement awards in writing to over 800 students who will graduate from high school in 1990. Only students who are juniors in the academic year of 1988-89 may be nominated for 1989 awards. Nomination must be sent to NCTE by January 23, 1989.

For more information and nomination blanks, write to Achievement Awards in Writing, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

## Call for Papers

The Writing Centers Association, East Central Region, announces its Eleventh Annual Conference, to be held on May 5-6, 1989, at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. The theme of the conference is " Empowering Our Writing Centers, Empowering Our Students." Proposals are invited which address not only the standard concerns of writing centers but also the position of centers within the schools, and the special mission centers have to help students succeed. Persons interested in participating should submit a substantive one-page proposal (plus 3 copies) by December 16, 1988.

In addition, writing centers and labs are invited to display their materials and services at Materials Exchange Tables. If you plan to participate in the Materials Exchange, please send us, by March 1, a brief description of the types of materials you wish to submit and the amount of space you will need to display these materials.

Please send all proposals, requests for display space, and inquiries regarding registration to: U11e E. Lewes, Writing Resource Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH 43015

# Tutor' Column

## Bumps, charmers, and perfect ones

Tutoring in the Wright State Writing Center is interesting and rewarding because we encounter such a wide variety of student clients. By the end of the first tutoring session, tutors can generally tell what kind of student they are working with. For the most part, "tutees" fall into three general categories ac-cording to how they behave during their tutoring sessions: the Bump on a Log. the Charmer, and the Perfect One.

The first and most <u>difficult</u> type of student to work with is the proverbial Bump on a Log. These students always act as if being absolutely anywhere but the Writing Center would be just fine. Nothing short of a nuclear explosion can spark any sort of interest for them. Herb (not his real name) was one such Bump whose standard replies to all tutors' attempts to communicate with him were, "I dunno," "So?" and "Huh?" Tutors spend sleep-less nights pondering over ways to reach these students, even though they realize it is probably impossible. The best way to deal with Bumps is to sit back and let them take charge of the sessions. Whatever gets done gets done, and whatever grade is earned is earned, (Or, as Doris Day so melodically put it, "Que sera sera.") The clincher, however is when a Bump returns to the Center in what can only generously be called a state of consciousness to demand how the tutor could possibly accept pay for having let him or her submit such a terrible paper.

The Charmer, on the other hand, will go to lengthy extremes to capture the heart of a tutor and simultaneously dispel any ridiculous notion the tutor might have about identifying fragments. And chocolate bribes are among the Charmers' strongest weapons. It takes a phenomenal amount of will power and teeth gritting for the tutor to resist. (I would like all of you to know that, under normal circumstances, chocolate works wonders on tutors. If you happen to be a Charmer, however, forget it; any well-trained tutor can distinguish an limo-cent m & m from a suspicious Snickers.) Charmers are also handy with compliments,

commenting on anything from the swell shoe-laces on a tutor's Nikes to the healthy state of his or her cuticles. flattery will get you no-where. Once a tutor eventually convinces a Charmer that he or she has caught on to all the tricks and maneuverings, they can both get down to work. So although Chalmers may have the upper hand for the first few sessions, they eventually have no choice but to master the art of essay writing.

Tutors may have only one chance in a career to work with the third type of client- the Perfect One. But it Is certainly worth the wait. Perfect Ones always have something to work on and often divide each session into time segments so that they get everything done. During make-up week you might even find a Perfect One voluntarily coming in for a few more hours of practice with subordinate clauses.

One such Perfect One, whom we called "Freddy the Fair," is now a Writing Center legend. He had a perfect attendance record and a perfect score at the end of each quarter. During his tutoring sessions, Freddy would answer his tutor's questions before they were even finished and would offer to read his work aloud without being asked to do so. Since Freddy was learning disabled, he went out of his way to take advantage of all the available services; he used the computer spelling pro-gram a true high-tech expert. The entire staff of the Writing Center adored him and secretly, yet venomously, envied the most fortunate tutor who worked with him. Occasion-ally, a rare Perfect One will stride into the Center with pen in hand, ready to get to work. (Freddy, by the way, graduated summa cum laude and went on to win the Mr. Galaxy body building contest. He is now full owner in the Awesome Body Training Centers located in six major U.S. cities.)

Although I have described only the purest of each specimen, hybrid mixtures exist as well. For example, a student can be a Perfect Bump on a Log or even a Perfectly Charming Bump on a Log. By far, the most deadly combination of all is the Perfect Charmer, who

# Three approaches to proofreading

A study of the 1984 Writing Lab Directory edited by Muriel Harris reveals that university writing centers are virtual clones. As awns of the freshman composition program, they almost uniformly describe their services to students as help in process, rhetorical decisions, and correctness. Although the latter area, currently termed the process of editing for surface errors, has not been popular in the recent literature, clearly writing center tutors work daily with students who need help in improving writing mechanics. Tutors as well as students know that papers with minimal errors will receive better grades.

Further similarities in the Directory descriptions given by larger schools are the populations served and the types of programs offered. Most schools indicate that the majority of their clients are freshmen, with a considerable proportion of international students among them. Our writing center is no exception. About ninety-five percent of our students are enrolled in freshman English. and about ten percent of these are inter-national students struggling to meet exacting standards difficult even for native speakers. Because the university has a selective admission policy- that is, students must be in the upper half of their high school graduating class to enroll, we do not see the kind of writer described by teachers in schools with open admissions. Our typical students are weak in each of the elements of writing: generating ideas. arranging them. smoothing out style, and- often most pronounced of all- correcting mechanics. But they are not far out of step with their more successful classmates. They have entered the course somewhat behind and need some extra help to bring them up to an average, or C, grade level, and this help is best found in a writing center one-on-one tutorial.

Our center serves walk-in students, who may come for help in any phase of the writing process, and students assigned to the center for a semester of work because they have failed to meet the standards of the initial freshman composition course. Although we have some peer tutors, most of our staff are graduate students who have not taught in a classroom. To help our students and the tutors as well, we have developed handouts that serve three groups: 1) the walk-in students, 2) the native speakers who have not passed the first semester of freshman English and are subsequently assigned to weekly. hour-long sessions at the center. and 3) the international students who

have also failed to pass their first freshman English course and who will also be tutored regularly at the center.

We have found that no texts meet the needs of our students. as well as the constraints of our time allotments, and thus have developed our own materials. We feel that students enjoy working with the individually designed materials, which are quite different from the boring exercises in thick handbooks they have met all too often before. Although we have many handouts on the more global elements of writing. we will describe here what we think are basic handouts for teaching proofreading techniques to each of these three groups.

## Walk-in Students

A systematic approach to proofreading works well for all three types of writing center users although it can be especially useful for the walk-in who needs help with a limited number of writing problems. This approach assumes that students will produce fewer errors if they learn how to search for and correct one kind of error at a time.

The tutor helps students learn to use the systematic approach by first examining their papers to determine the most frequent or serious editing errors and the grammatical environments that create those errors. For example, some students frequently have a comma splice before "it," while others have comma splices because they believe that conjunctive adverbs operate like coordinating conjunctions. Some students create fragments when using "that" as a relative, while others think a phrase beginning "for example" is a complete sentence. After the tutor identifies an error pattern, she prepares an individualized error analysis sheet that explains the error and provides step-by-step instructions for identifying and correcting the error. This error analysis sheet should have as few grammatical teams as possible al-though sometimes students need to understand such fundamental terms as "subject" and "verb." While it is difficult- if not impossible- to explain these terms to a classroom of students by having them use a grammar handbook, it is rather easy to teach these terms to one student at a time by having him identify subjects and verbs in sentences he used in earlier papers. After the tutor has taken a few minutes to prepare an error

analysis sheet (better yet, the tutor can have sheets prepared in advance), she is ready to take the student through the steps so that he can practice using this systematic approach to proof-reading. Students who make only a few errors or errors that are easy to identify are ready to use the error analysis sheet independently in as little as half an hour; other students may need to return before they are ready to use it effectively as a final step in the revision process.

Below are two sample error analysis sheets. The first is designed to help students who create comma splices by putting a comma instead of a period before "it." These students apparently think that a clause beginning with "it" cannot stand alone as a sentence if it refers to a noun in the previous sentence. Tutors can help these students to produce fewer errors by showing them how to use the error analysis sheet below.

### A. correcting comma splices

1. Mark each sentence that has a comma before the word "it." Now take each of these sentences in turn through the instructions below.

2. Does the sentence have a subject and verb before the comma and another subject and verb after the comma?

  a.. lf the sentence does not have a subject and verb before the comma and another subject and verb after the comma, do not change the punctuation. The sentence probably does not have a comma splice.

  THIS SENTENCE IS OK: In October, it will turn cold.

  b. lf the sentence has a subject and verb before the comma and another subject and verb after the comma, go to step 3.

3.Does the sentence begin with a subordinator (because, when, after, if. etc.)?

  a. If the sentence begins with a subordinator, do not ch e the punctuation. The sentence probably does not have a comma splice.

  THIS SENTENCE lS OK: Because the boat had small leaks, it began slowly to sink.

  b. lf the sentence does not begin with a

subordinator, you probably have a comma splice. Change the comma to a period.

  COMMA SPLICE: The car gathered speed slowly, it then suddenly swerved around the boulder.

  CORRECTlON: The car gathered speed slowly. lt then suddenly swerved around the boulder.

Other students create fragments because they think "who" and "which" can begin a declarative sentence. For these students, the tutor can give them the error analysis sheet below.

### B. correcting fragments

1. Mark every sentence that begins with "who" or "which." Now take these sentences in turn through the instructions that follow.

2. Is the sentence a question? A question should end in a question mark and can be rephrased by moving the "who" or "which" to the second half of the sentence.

  THIS SENTENCE IS OK: Which candidate are you supporting?

  REPHRASED: You are supporting which candidate?

3. If the construction is not a question, it is probably a fragment. Put a comma before the fragment and join it to the sentence before it.

  FRAGMENT: I remember seeing the movie. Which was about two pioneer families moving westward.

  CORRECTION: I remember seeing the movie, which was about two pioneer families moving westward.

Tutors should not expect students to solve all the problems in their papers. If a student has misspelled words, fragments, comma splices, and unnecessary apostrophes, the tutor should concentrate at first on only the most serious problem. lf a student makes comma splices for five reasons, the tutor should have her work at first on one or two. For students whose papers have many serious errors, the tutor should see if the composition instructor is willing to grade on improvement. Students may give up trying if they still earn an F when they have reduced their errors by half.

Furthermore, instructors and tutors should ignore- at least for a time- the awkward construction that may occur as students learn to correct their own errors. The goal of this kind of proof-reading strategy is not perfection but improvement and independent correction.

### Assigned Students.

Students assigned to our writing center have taken the first of two semesters of freshman English but have not met minimum standards in mechanics. All of them show weaknesses in sentence structure, and most have difficulty with areas of content and organization although they have had classroom instruction focused on the latter areas. Our first semester course devotes little time to basic mechanics or sentence structure; thus, students who begin the year considerably behind in these areas have difficulty finding help in the classroom.

Once students have received a grade of incomplete for the course, they are assigned to weekly meetings in the writing center, each lasting an hour. One tutor works with them throughout the semester; however, most students are able to master the principles in about eight weeks. We teach students the least possible grammatical terminology, leading them through five or six lessons in developing basic sentence types. We assign a short paper each week and encourage students to try out the sentence types we have introduced. The system is simple- we work basically with manipulating independent and dependent clauses.

We have developed our own manual, which we ask students to buy. It contains a short series of brief grammatical explanations, each followed by a page of sentence combining exercises. After years of attempting to use handbooks and texts, we have found that they contain more information than students actually need. A study of our students' papers indicates that only a limited number of errors actually occur often enough to lower the paper's grade. They are, in order of frequency: spelling and apostrophe, run-on sentence, fragment, and misplaced comma. We have our own computer program for spelling, and students work independently on the terminal. But a tutor works through the grammar manual with each student.

The first three lessons are fundamental, and once students have received the explanations they need from the manual, with help from the

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tutor, they are able to proofread their papers with much greater confidence than they have had before.

Lesson I is entitled "Subject-Verb Identification." Definitions are kept to a minimum, such as "Most verbs are action words: run, walk, think. Some verbs do not show action: is, are, were, have, seem." "Find the verb first. Then ask who- or what. The person or thing doing the action is the subject." The exercise page following the explanations contains fifteen independent clauses with a variety of structures, such as inverted subject and verb, compound verbs, or helping verbs. Stu-dents, with the tutor's help, identify the subjects and verbs in sentences like "Farm House was the first building on the Iowa State campus." "It was probably built in the 1850s." "On the top floor were rooms for students." After the exercises, students are asked to generate their own sentences, prompted by instructions to "Write a sentence which contains one subject with two verbs, two subjects with one verb, two subjects with two verbs." In order to emphasize the principle of the independent clause, the tutor must watch that they do not produce compound or complex sentences at this point.

Lesson II is devoted to "Joining Independent Clauses." At first we had included instructions for using semicolons, but later decided that the principle should be explained in a separate lesson. In this lesson, the emphasis is placed on joining clauses with coordinating conjunctions, which we call the "fanboys" (for, and, not, but, or, yet, so). Students enjoy and remember the acronym. The definitions are simple: "Independent clauses may be joined with a coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions are the following words only." After listing the "fan boys," we instruct them to "Place a comma before the fanboy conjunction when you join independent clauses." We also warn students that independent clauses may not be joined with a count without a fanboys conjunction; the other option is to create two sentences. The exercises offer kernel sentences, and students choose appropriate con-junctions or decide to create two sentences. The tutor explains that emphasis and parallelism govern the stylistic choices.

Lesson III introduces the adverbial subordinate clause, but uses the title "Independent/ Dependent Clauses. " Just as with the fanboys conjunctions, we cue the students with a list of common subordinators: when, since, because, if, although, etc. We explain that dependent clauses

do not complete a meaning; the reader is left hanging in midair waiting for the independent clause to finish the sentence. We also explain, along with how to punctuate, how subordinators actually subordinate the content of their clause.

With these three exercises students can begin to identify punctuation needs by looking for key words. At the same time, they attempt sentence variety, and depending upon their ability to work with the principles, we lead them eventually into relative clauses, parentheticals, verbals, and, with better students, semicolons and colons. Our kernel sentences deal with topics of interest to college students, such as events and locations on campus, and students usually respond to the sentences with a chuckle. Also, since a tutor works with the student to ensure that each sentence is correctly constructed, the experience is entirely positive.

After using our manual for five years, we have found that on the average, students reduce the errors in their papers by half, and it is rare that one of our students receives less than a C in the second semester of freshman English.

## ESL Students

Among the students served by the lSU Writing Center are the university's ESL (English-as-a-second-language) students, the clear majority of whom are advanced students of English. Although the typical ESL student at ISU is majoring in one of the sciences and is highly motivated to improve her language skills, time constraints make necessary the center's employing quite a wide variety of teaching strategies with a group of students that in some respects is less varied than its native counterpart.

Writing Center tutors usually do not have a background in ESL instruction, and when faced with editing an ESL composition, they may be unnerved from the start. If the tutors refer to the Writing Center's manual, they will no doubt find that it is not suited to the needs of the center's ESL students. The manual's main concerns are cor- recting fused sentences, comma splices, and fragments- clearly the grammar mistakes that plague the center's native students; but the ESL students, who do make these mistakes, usually have other grammar problems that are equally serious and that may also prevent them from passing freshman English.

Over the last two years, the Writing Center

has been developing a tutorial manual for its ESL students. The core manual addresses the fundamental mechanical errors to be found in ESL compositions. Eventually there will be a variety of supplemental handouts addressing problems of style.

Any native English speaker with good grammar should be able to develop special proof-reading materials for ESL students. The main thing to remember is that most of these students need rules, that in fact they won't feel comfortable without them, and that the more rules they are given, the more satisfied with the tutoring session they will be. Consequently, an ESL tutor must develop the ability to distill structures into memorable formulas.

For instance, if a student has written the sentence, " He looked forward to go to the party," tutors might ask themselves what the correct sentence would sound like, and then state that after "look forward to," there is always an -ing verb. If they are feeling mortal, they might say that after "look forward to" there is usually an -ing verb. By making these types of generalisations, they would not be pretending to know more than they actually do since after all, as native-speakers, they are relative experts in the language. The same tutors would be equally well qualified to make more systemic observations. such as "after a modal, there is never a past tense verb," or "a singular noun needs an article," or " an -ing (gerund] phrase is always singular." Of course some structures, such as the relative or noun clauses, are extraordinarily complex. For help in presenting these structures, the Celce-Murcia/Larson-Freeman text, The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course, is an excellent reference.

One way to decide what types of problems to address in an ESL handbook would be to conduct an error analysis of a number of ESL compositions and, based on this analysis, decide which problems are the most serious and/or prevalent. Tutors could then make models of the correct structure (for example, "preposition + noun") and test the model in a wide variety of contexts in order to determine whether the model is a sound one.

When typed, the model structure, along with the descriptive rule that has been generated from it, should be set off neatly, in boxes if possible. There should not be too many exceptions to the model; if numerous exceptions occur, the model should probably be recast altogether.

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Students should have ample opportunity to practice the model- depending on its complexity, five or more times- in sentence-or discourse-level exercises. For example, they can be instructed either to "write five sentences using `were' in a clause after 'if," or to "write a paragraph in which you use " were" in a clause after "if five times." If students have a good model to work with and practice the model sufficiently, the material will succeed.

The three handouts discussed have been taken from the ISU core tutorial manual for ESL students. They are part of a fairly large and complex unit concerned with verb forms, functions, and sequencing.

Most ESL texts teach the simple, perfect, and pressive forms of the present, past, and future verb tenses, with their numerous meanings, beginning with the simple present and ending with the future perfect progressive. Consequently, many verb units take up halo. textbook. Since almost any ESL text will discuss verbs in this manner, and since the writing center tutor does not have much time to work with each student, the manual presents verbs according to function rather than form.

For example, one verb fox "describes this very moment." Some students will know this tense by the name " present progressive"; others will not. The handout gives the model form (am/ is/are + be-form verb) and two examples: "The surveyors are working outside the school" and "The president is speaking on T.V. now." Later the student is asked to describe in complete sentences six events that are happening right now. For a comprehensive list of verb forms and functions, consult either The Grammar Book or Writing; A College Handbook, by J. Heffernan.

The materials that the ISU Writing Center is creating for its students provide the type of grammar instruction most relevant to these students' needs. Omitted are the myriad principles that occur infrequently but confuse struggling college composition students. The core manuals are already being used with some success in the Writing Center, and supplemental materials are always in the works.

For information about tutoring walk-in students, contact Marty Graham; for information about the Writing Center Tutorial Manual, contact Carol David; for information about the ESL writing contact Anne Richards. All three can be

reached at 347 Ross Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 50011.

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### A paradoxical approach to train-ing tutors: A theory of failure

The literature is chock full of theoretical discussions on the administrative and instructional concerns of writing labs. These articles focus their content toward success in the delivery of individual writing instruction. What appears to be missing from this body of knowledge, however, is a theory of failure. No one has ever developed a theory of failure because it has been merely assumed that anyone can fail, and that no one has ever had to learn how to do it. And when failure occurs, theorists have not been willing to waste their time poking around in it to assemble a theory.

But if a theory of failure were formulated, it would not be esoteric in any sense, but rather, practical. ln tutor training, for instance, tutors learn many ideological frameworks (e.g. , audience sensitivity) which they rarely carry out anyway, so an introduction to a theory of failure should be welcomed and easy to follow. It would actually follow a well-accepted psychological theory called paradoxical intention, which operates like reverse psychology. Since humans are often known to do the opposite of what is dictated, that opposite behavior is set up as the desired outcome. There-fore, when directors tell tutors, for example, to listen emphatically to their students, tutors would do just the opposite, and a theory of failure is set in motion.

I suggest a more integrated, holistic way of

looking at tutoring. Since tutoring activities are multi-faceted, multi-dimensional processes, we cannot continue to look at only one end of the spectrum. We need emphasis on what makes tutors fail as well as what makes them succeed.

Ten fundamental principles are presented here to increase the chance of failure for any tutor. While this listing is not meant to be exhaustive, it encompasses the most important areas that make success as a failure almost inevitable.

(l)The use of difficult terminology must serve as the infrastructure of all tutoring sessions. Students perceive tutors as experts and tutors' use of -Lei ins such as "generative rhetoric," "semantic processing units," and "metacognitive monitoring," should support this role perception. No need to know what the terms mean, though, since students are so awed, they don't ask. lf they should, tutors should insist that the definitions are so complex, they must be saved for the next sessionortwo. lf students persist, punish them by giving them a transformational grammar text and state emphatically "This is a lot like Math." You'll see them wince and shove the book back on the dusty shelf. Guard against those students who actually know the meanings of the terms. Get rid of them immediately lest other students become confused and mistake them for the tutor.

(2)For papers that are particularly lacking, nonverbal communication is an honest and equitable way to tell students that their papers lack merit. Yawn, raise eye-brows, sigh deeplywhile they discuss their "idea work." De-ball your swea ter if necessary. Forget what you learned in tutor training about being aware of your nonverbal behaviors. Use them opulently, even exaggerate them, because the old adage works well in tutoring: "Actions speak louder than words."

(3)Allow generous amounts of time (hours) for students to engage in rich brainstorming or freewriting exercises. Work through a sample topic with your student and model how much fun it is to cluster and free associate ideas. Throw your head back and look exhilarated, as if you're having a metaphysical experience. Don't worry if directors wonder what students

are up to; they'll soon recognize that it's that dizzy look students get when they're being "ultra-creative."

(4)Insist that only years of tutoring really helps students improve. Tutoring is often likened to counseling practices, and counselors seem to have no problem holding their clients in long-term treatment. Think of it as an occupational safeguard, a never-ending number of students who need you. Remember, it is the skillful tutor who can keep students dependent for as long as five years.

(5)Read papers aloud so students can"hear" where they want changes. Rather than keeping your voice low, how-ever, use a deep resonant tone while read-ing clumsy sentences such as: "l think that the most people have to have a job." If your student doesn't hear her mistakes, snickers from other students will help her understand, while you simply can remain the " reader."

(6)Use humor. If a student has ridiculous sounding sentence structures, feel comfortable in laughing aloud. Honestly ex-pressed humor is genuine and it relieves tension. And if you get six students in one day all with wearisome papers on why abortion should be legalized, you deserve a hearty laugh (or cry).

(7)Any student who dares bring in a paper that is due within 24 hours must be turned away. Explain simply, but very firmly, that good writing is the product of numerous revisions. Explain revision processes in terms of re-vision- it sounds catchy and cogent.

(8)Writing labs should employ a variety of tutors so that every student can be assured a good "match." Hire tutors with a wide range of ages, interests, and motivations, but always have a "Sexy Suzy," a " Macho Man," a "Ned Nerdbrain," and "Mother Martha," for these are the types most people want and come back for.

(9)Remember that elementary principles of psychology have their place in tutoring relationships, For instance, students can improve merely from the power of su : es-lion- they believe they are getting good

help. So, if you're fatigued, just sit in silence and say "uh-huh" at intervals- the student will improve anyway. For those special cases (which we dearly love) when students make 'discoveries" without even getting our help (e.g., while waiting in line at a drop-in service), tutors should not be overly humble. Take partial credit for their improvement, for the very expectation of your presence and guidance helped them make those discoveries in the first place.

(10)Perhaps the most important rule is to refuse to define the goals of tutoring. If tutors set goals, someone is likely to raise a question whether they have been achieved. If it does become necessary to define a goal, the phrasing should be ambiguous and so esoteric that anyone (especially those pert, new tutors) will turn their attention elsewhere. Should they press the point of goals in tutor training meetings (where more important issues should be discussed), a cloudy discussion of the writing process should appease these fledglings. Sufficient self-doubt will be aroused, and they'll readily take on trying to better understand the writing

process as their goal.

Clearly, the area of failure is a fruitful one for tutoring research. If the ideas presented here are efficacious, then development of a theory of failure is close-at-hand. If nothing else, these principles will produce lively discussions in tutor training circles, and certainly assure that tutors have fun as they fail.

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ake County
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Bumps, charmers, and perfect ones

has unwary tutors eating from the palm of his or her smooth, manicured hand. The most important thing to remember is that no matter what kind of student client you are, you should always try to write your best and make your tutor proud of you. After all, happy tutoring sessions lead to great writing!

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Address correction requested