WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

....from the editor....

Writing labs have been de-scribed as always in motion, expanding, changing, adding new services, finding new needs that have to be met. Even in tutorials we never quite know what will happen next. That variety and the lack of easy grooves (or ruts?) to fall into define individualized instruction in the writing lab and keep us on our toes. (In our Writing Lab that also means incessant rearranging of furniture In our endless quest to make better use of too little space.)

In the same vein, the news-letter keeps changing. This month we are initiating a feature I hope you'll like-periodic columns writ-ten by contributing editors. To kick off, Evelyn Posey (of the U. of Texas at El Paso), offers the first of her occasional columns on computers in the writing lab. Your responses to this and other columns to appear in the future are invited (perhaps to appear as a "letters to the editor" section). And, of course, your articles, announcements, comments, names of new members for our group, and yearly donations are always appreciated. (Some things never change.)

Muriel Harris, editor

Opening lines: Storting the tutoring session

The Writing Center at the University of Alaska. Fairbanks is small, tiny in fact. My office is at the back. If I keep my door open, as I like to, I hear most of the conversations going on at the three tutoring tables. Sometimes I try to filter out the sessions as I go about my daily writing or teaching preparation; sometimes, a voice, a word, a dialogue penetrates and I find myself enjoying the progress of one of the tutor's and writer's conferences. Over the last semester, I realized that certain opening lines were repeated again and again: "My teacher sent me," or "I need a paper proofread," and so on. As I had been engaged on a research project to determine the effectiveness of various referral methods (what gets new writers to the center), these student writer opening lines engaged my sub-conscious attention, for these writers were already telling me, in part, why they were coming to the center. I also realized that the manner in which my tutors re-sponded to opening lines was crucial in setting the tone of the tutoring session and in encourag-

ing the new writer to step across the doorway and into the center.

Thinking of this, I began to jot down opening lines and answers. My goal was simple. I would record what I felt were effective and perhaps less effective responses to these opening lines and use them as a discussion/training device at our next tutor meeting. When I did so, tutors were highly entertained; they saw the function of these opening lines clearly and gave me their opinions about which were common to their experience and which responses they thought valu able . Together, we compiled the list that follows. We would welcome additions from other readers as we realize opening lines will vary from center to center. We did come to feel, however, that consideration of these preliminary or early-in-the-session opening lines could tell tutors a lot about the conference that was shaping up before them.

A. Earliest Opening Lines
(writer is standing in the center doorway)

1. Opening Line: "I need a paper proofread."

Suggested Responses:
- "Sit down and let's look at It."
  - "We don't proofread but we do.. , ,
  - Ignore and start the session in your regular way.

Discussion: Our Writing Center does not provide proofreading services although we are willing to teach proofreading skills. With new tutors, I have sometimes heard the response, We don't do proofreading"- period. And I've had to run out to the door to keep the writer from walking away. It is important to be clear about what a center doesn't do, but that should always be followed (and more likely be preceded) by a statement of services or support. We have found that student writers often don't really know what they mean when they say "proofread," hence the suggestion to ignore the term and get down to work. Other tutors prefer to communicate their own under-standing of the differences between revision, proofreading, editing, and so on. In any case, all tutors agreed, we want student writers not to get hung up on jargon ("proofread"); instead we want to invite them in to see what a tutoring session is like.

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2. Opening Line: "I just need someone to look at my paper for five minutes."

Suggested Responses:
- "Well then, how do you want me to respond?"
- "Well, sessions usually run at least a 1/2 hour, do you have that much time sometime today'?"
- "Okay, what should we start with?"

Discussion: Tutors felt this remark indicated several things. First, they felt a tutor needed 1) to know if the student writer really only had five minutes in which case the tutor would try to reschedule a session for a later time, or [2] even if the student writer only had five minutes but still really wanted to proceed, to ask the writer to focus the discussion. The second type of student writer turned out to have more than five minutes but seemed to be a highly apprehensive writer or a writer who didn't understand what goes on in a tutoring conference. For this type of writer, the tutors wanted to agree with the writer and then work into a regular length session- for none of us had ever seen a session that couldn't be extended past five minutes- without mentioning time lengths that might scare the writer away. All tutors thought it was counterproductive to argue about or insist on a longer time commitment.

B. Session Opening tines
(writer and tutor are sitting down together
and ready to start)

1. Opening Line: "My teacher sent me."

Suggested Responses:
- "Who is your teacher?" (ask about the class)
- Break the tension: "I know that teacher/ class" and then switch to paper. - "Well, let's look at your paper."

Discussion: Tutors had varied feelings about this line. Some felt comfortable talking about the teacher and class to try to diffuse the writer's anxiety or anger at being sent to the Center. Others felt that talking about the class led them into dangerous areas of counseling and potential disloyalty to the teacher. These tutors preferred to simply start the session and work to make it a positive experience. All tutors agreed that they used intuition to decide which of these two opposite approaches to use.

2. Opening Line: "It's a terribly boring paper."

Suggested Responses:
- W h y do you feel it's boring?' - "Are you sure?"
- "Let's look at your paper together."

Discussion: Tutors encountered this opening line less often than some but still felt that this type of statement or variations of such a statement indicated that the writer had low self-esteem and high distrust of her own writing abilities. Thinking of this, the tutors decided it was important to develop a supportive conference that let the writer value her own writing. Some tutors thought the session would best be started by mirroring the statement and asking the writer to illuminate why she felt unsure about the writing. A few felt that a humorous approach might be useful: Are you sure?" or "I can't believe that." But some tutors cautioned that this approach should only be used with student writers who had come to the center previously or with whom the tutor already had a working (and joking) relationship. As always, some tutors simply suggested getting to work on the paper and not dwelling on the hesitant session-starting comment.

3. Opening Line: "I can't understand why I got a C (B, D, F, Rewrite)...."

Suggested Responses:
- "Have you talked to your teacher yet?" - "Well, let's look at the paper together.-- "Tell me what you think about the paper."

Discussion: Tutors felt that this opening line was particularly problematic and encountered it fairly often. First, they wanted to be sure the student writer had talked to the teacher or knew that he could talk to the teacher. In a way, tutors felt they were teaching some students coping skills, explaining the function of office hours and student/ teacher conferences to freshman student writers who may not have understood how or been brave enough to approach their teachers. However, tutors also didn't want to become embroiled in a teacher/student dispute, so they tried never to make remarks that would undermine a teacher's authority or that tried to second-guess the teacher (although it is certainly true that tutors are often themselves bewildered by the teacher's comments or grading criteria). Tutors would carefully work through the paper with the student and try to help the student writer articulate concerns (" Tell me what you think about the paper"). In a sense, the tutor was working as a careful (and cautious) interpreter of the student/teacher relationship.

4. Opening Line: "I just want to pass this class and get out of English.'

Suggested Responses:
- "Let's see how we can do that.-
- Deflect student irritation, anger and try to make the current session productive and even pleasurable,
- Relate own history/anxieties about being a writer and/or English student.

Discussion: For this opening line there was much less agreement as to responses or approaches. Some tutors wanted to avoid the issue and as usual, get on to the writing. Most tutors felt that a certain amount of empathy was in order; some felt that relating similar frustrations they may have had with papers, classes, or school would create some useful dialog and let them move more rapidly into a session with such an unwilling student writer. Others opted for less counseling and more direct attention to the paper, perhaps

ending with a pitch for greater student/writer involvement.

5. Opening Line: "I need help with grammar" (when paper has pressing organizational problems).

Suggested Responses:
- "Okay, but...." (agree to work with student writer on paper but shift to organizational problems.)
- "When is your paper due?"
- "Okay, let's look at your paper. If we need them, we have some computer programs you can look at."

Discussion: Tutors wanted to address both problems and not lose the attention and confidence of the student writer. Some felt they would agree but quickly point out some of the concerns they had about organization and see if the writer would be willing to shift focus. Another tutor felt that the time frame for writing the paper needed to be assessed immediately. If it was an early draft, the tutor could shift to organization and talk about setting up a future conference for a later time. If the paper was due soon, this tutor felt a need to respond immediately to the wilier's concerns by teaching some proofreading skills but not by correcting or proofreading the paper. Other tutors wanted to assess the paper, discuss the tutoring session and make a contract ("What if we work for the first ____ minutes on organization and the last ____ minutes on those grammar issues that have you worried. And by the way, I'll be sure to show you our computer programs..."), including a possible second appointment or introduction to other Center resources.

6. Opening Line: "Are you an English teacher'?'"

Suggested Responses: (at our Center we have peer tutors and GTA tutors who also teach sections of freshman composition)
- "No, I'm a tutor, but I'm also an English major and I do a lot of writing. In fact, I've taken this class too." - "No, I'm a junior, but that's okay. Sometimes it makes it easier for me to look at a paper because I'm a writer like you."
- "Yes, but right now I'm a tutor, and I like

this chance to work with welters one-to-one."

Discussion: Because our center has GTA and peer tutors, this question sometimes arises in a contentious way- an occasional student writer not wanting to be placed with peer or non-"teacher" tutors. The peer tutors suggested that peers always mention commonalities, emphasizing the sense tutors had of themselves as peers, fellow writers. On the other hand, GTA tutors sometimes have to underplay their teaching roles so that the student writer doesn't assume that GTA tutors have equal authority with the class teacher. If the student writer does assume this, the assumption can result in writer disappointment when the class teacher's paper evaluation conflicts with the tutor's advice. To avoid this, GTA tutors are careful to emphasize their consultative status and to direct grade/class questions the writer might have to the writer's teacher.

7. Opening Line: "Okay. I got some feedback on the last two papers. Look's like we're doing okay."

Suggested response :
- 'That's great."
- "Let's see how we did" (said humorously).
- "It's your paper. You get the credit."

Discussion: This comment wasn't heard over and over (although the one recorded here was heard), but variations of positive response did occur. Tutors recommended celebrating with the writer and moving into a vigorous conference. One tutor reminded us to let the writer know that most of the credit goes to the writer although pleasure in student writer success is shared by the whole Center.

We at the UAF Writing Center would be pleased to hear your responses to these responses and to share other Opening Lines. Contact: Wendy Bishop, Coordinator, UAF Writing Center, English Department, University of Alaska, Fair-banks, AK, 99775.

Wendy Bishop
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The evolution of a writing center

In their article on "Liberatory Writing Centers: Restoring Authority to Writers," Tilly and John Warnock focus on "attitudes that invite revision." At Somersworth High School (and more recently at Pembroke Academy), as this high school writing center was evolving, I was constantly revising my own views about writing centers, the role of writing in the school, and the purposes of writing centers In the high school curriculum. I discovered that, although writing instruction can flourish without a writing center, a writing program can be strengthened and enhanced by the creation of a writing center.

Based on the research about writing instruction and the writing process, I established a center that was interdisciplinary and open to all students, that emphasized the centrality of the interaction between the tutor and the writer, and that served as a resource and library for subject-area teachers, a source of collaboration with those teachers as they taught writing in their classrooms, and a center for student and teacher publishing,

The support for the writing center was gratifying. Several teachers from various disciplines expressed an interest in tutoring students regularly; others offered to help wherever they were needed. The administration freed teachers from study halls in order to allow them to work in the center. The school board and superintendent gave the go-ahead for our putting the project together. Even the National Council of Teachers of English recognized Somersworth High School as a finalist in the Centers of Excellence program because of the nature of these efforts.

While it took several weeks and numerous writing center-sponsored activities to see a substantial flow of students to the writing center, it eventually drew both new and repeat visitors to seek advice and assistance on writing assignments in almost every subject (English, social studies, science, math, foreign language, home economics) and numerous topics (essays on college applications, poetry, research papers, science labs, essays, short stories). Staff members joined us from time to time to share their experiences with the teaching of writing, to ask for feedback on an assign

ment, to discuss their own writing, or to borrow books, magazines, or articles of interest to them and their students. Not every teacher actively participated in the writing center pro-gram, but many students were serviced by this resource.

Following two powerful contemporary perspectives on the teaching of writing, our center was based on the concepts that "writing is most usefully viewed as a process and.. .that writing curricula need to be student-centered. ...Whereas in the `old' center instruction tends to take place after or apart from writing, and tends to focus on the correction of textual problems, in the `new' center teaching takes place as much as possible during writing, during the activity being learned, and tends to focus on the activity itself" (North).

As I sent students front the journalism class to the writing center, I found that they returned with a strong sense that they had been able to take control of their writing. The teachers who used the center regularly explored various methods of encouraging students to benefit from it-by requiring it as part of the writing assignment, by offering extra credit to those students who chose to attend the center, or by simply suggesting that students consider it sometime during the writing process. The two directed methods were more successful than the latter in leading students to participate actively in the benefits of the writing center, however, more of our students visited the center voluntarily as a result of their positive experiences.

Student Response

Student reactions to the center were fascinating, because they confirmed the original vision for the writing center. The images that they used to describe the benefits of the tutoring were related to the shaping and forming of the ideas and structure of a paper, the expansion of their thoughts and ideas, and the drawing together of their thoughts, words, and sentences. Their reactions underscored the success of our providing "an environment rich in a humane commitment to human communication." As tutors learned "to trust their in-

stints, writers [learned) to trust theirs" (Hartwell). One junior English student articulately highlighted those aspects of the writing center that his peers repeatedly mentioned as the salient points of the tutoring:

> The writing center has been a great help to me this year. I have used it for almost all of my classes (except math). I found out that by going in there at different times, when different teachers are there, you can get different opinions; ultimately, by visiting the writing cent e r r enough, you can get to know the views of the different teachers, and maybe even choose one that you can best relate to. When I do tell my thoughts to the teacher in the writing center, I don't feel that I am being pushed to change my ideas, but am being su ested maybe to expand my thoughts or change a few words around. It hink that if more people used the writing center, they would be learning ideas, new styles of writing, and would increase their potential of getting a better grade. Writing can often be very difficult, ...If you're going to write a lot of your thoughts down on paper, why not do a good job on it?

Like this student, many students-especially those who sought advice and guidance from the center on several occasions-appreciated being able to meet the challenges of the process of writing and often to receive higher grades for their ef^forts: they were able to focus, define, or expand their thoughts be-fore and after they started to put pen to paper; they felt "more confidence about what [they were) writing"; and t h e y were reassured by the commitment of the writing center teachers to respect their right to choose to accept or reject the suggestions of the teachers.

Writing is a difficult and challenging process. Even the professional writer struggles at times to write his or her thoughts. Yet we, as educators, often seem willing to allow students- those novices in writing- to explore the process without the support and guidance necessary to allow them even a modicum of success. The writing center moved us closer to encouraging our students' growing confidence. They learned "to conceive ideally, to play with

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'as if ' and the future tenses, to imagine how they might `rewrite' themselves and their worlds" (Warnock). With the help of sensitive professionals, students not only became better writers but also better people.

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Hartwell. Patrick. "The Writing Center and the Paradoxes of Written-Down Speech," In Writing Centers: Theory and Admini-stration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1984.

North, Stephen M. `The Idea of a Writing Center," College English 46 (1984): 433-446.

Warnock, Tilly and John Warnock. "Liberatory Writing Centers," In Writing C e n t e r s : Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1984.

New from NCTE

Focus on Collaborative Learning: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1988. Ed. Jeff Golub. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1988. 170 pp. paper-bound, $9.95 (NCTE member price, $7.50).

This collection of essays by classroom teachers who have incorporated collaborative learning in English language arts classes offers insights and advice on developing collaborative approaches. Essays include topics such as group papers, talking about books, evaluating group work, partnerships in the writing process, and ways to monitor individual progress and ensure success in peer revision groups. Because the book is so heavily classroom-oriented, much of it is not directly applicable to the one-to-one setting of writing lab tutorials. However, for tutorial centers which include small group work for response or revision, there may be some interesting reading here.

Tutor's Column

What Is a peer tutor?

A peer is an equal, as in rank or ability. A peer tutor in writing is an equal in rank to her tutee, though she may possess more relative ability in writing. A peer tutor is not a teacher, for a teacher instructs as a profession. The purpose or objective of a peer tutor should be to suggest ways to improve or refine the skills a tutee already possesses. A tutor can undertake this by engaging her tutee in an ongoing dialogue about writing. The one-on-one personal relationship enjoyed by peers makes this task both possible and enjoy-able. The tutee is nudged into collaborating with the tutor in a friendly non-threatening manner: through working on a collaborative basis with a peer tutor, a tutee receives information about improving his/her writing, without receiving a grade or pressure, as with a teacher. The information a tutee gains is gained through a social manner: it is simply two students discussing and gaining insight about writing.

When an individual visits the writing center, she probably already possesses basic writing skills: that is, she can express basic ideas coherently. Therefore, a tutor's job is not to teach; the teaching has already been done. It is a tutor's job to improve qualities the tutee already possesses by stimulating creativity and confidence, making suggestions and helping to organize ideas. By working with what a tutee already knows, the tutor saves a lot of wasted time: if a tutor works on improving ideas with the tutee, it will prompt or stimulate new ideas. When a tutor initiates ways to improve ideas, by means of brainstorming, exercises, etc., she is simply opening the door for another approach to the idea. For example, if a student is researching a paper on horse breeding and brings it into the writing center because she is having trouble developing it, the tutor could work on discovering different routes to the topic: what breeds of horses are most used, how much money is involved, how babies of bred horses fare with those that are unbred. The tutor acts as a guide, leading the tutee down the pathway of ideas and creating an ongoing dialogue about writing.

The dialogue the tutee has with the tutor should be one that the tutee can apply outside the writing center. That is, she should gain insight on developing ideas, and refined skills that she can

use when the writing center doors close behind her. If a tutor were to provide information for use only in that brief session, the tutee would be partially served at best. However, if the tutor and tutee discuss different routes to attacking the assignment, and use them as guidelines to complete the assignment, the tutee will benefit: she can implement those ideas in all her assignments, making common errors less common. As the tutee works by herself, implementing the ideas, she will surely develop new ideas as well. She begins to internalize the conversation about writing she had with her tutor and is enabled to think through the process of writing.

Engaging the tutee in an ongoing dialogue prevents any "spoon feeding" by the tutor. Tutors should work with their tutees on developing ways to refine and improve writing abilities. Therefore, through the collaborative tutorials, both the tutor and the tutee should gain Insight into the writing process. The advantage of peer tutoring is that the process allows the tutee's potential ideas to work for her during and beyond the tutorial.
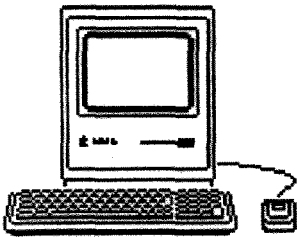
Cynthia Veinot Peer
Tutor Merrimack College

Micro Style   *by Evelyn Posey*

Computers in the writing center-who needs them?

Muriel Harris recently made the following comment about The Writing Lab Newsletter Reader Interest Survey, ".. .large numbers indicated little or no Interest in anything related to computers." Since I have found the computer to be a valuable tool in the University of Texas at El Paso writing centers, I wonder why other directors are not as interested in it. Have they tried it and decided that it doesn't improve writing, or is money too tight to take a chance on computers that might prove to be a costly mistake? Whatever the reason, I am convinced that those of us who successfully use computers in our centers need to share what we have learned so that our experiences will generate more interest in an excellent tool to teach writing.

Let me reassure some of you who are now thinking " probably easy for her to put computers in the writing center-took some computer science courses or something" that I have never taken a computer course and like most of you who use computers, simply taught myself to use one to process my own writing. Because I was impressed with the flexibility that the computer provided me, I wanted my students to benefit as well. After several years of adding a few computers here and some software there, we now have two computer writing centers at the University of Texas at El Paso. One, containing both Apple He and IBM PC's, is housed in our learning assistance center and the other, an IBM PC lab, is located in the College of Liberal Arts.

These writing centers are popular with our students, not only because of the availability of computers, but because we have trained tutors who help them learn to use the equipment and software programs, and in the learning assistance center, who tutor writing as well. Close to 1000 students a semester, some in scheduled classes and others on a walk-in basis, use the 55 computers in these two labs. My experience with these students convinces me that computers belong in

our centers. They motivate students who might not otherwise write, they facilitate the writing process, and they provide students with computing skills so necessary in an increasingly competitive job market.

We were pleasantly surprised at the eagerness of our students to write on computers. They often reveal their feelings about u sing the computers in their writing class journals. One basic writer, who never enjoyed writing in the past, expressed it this way, "Today was an important day for me. We worked in the computer room. I used the IBM, had a fantastic time. I was able to grasp the workings with ease. All I had when I went in was a topic sentence and some writing, so I practically had to write the entire thing on the machine. It was great fun. Unfortunately, I ran out of time." Again and again, students tell us how much they enjoy writing as a result of using the computer. They know that once they get some-thing on the screen, they can revise easily, allowing them to concentrate on the process rather than the product. If tutors are willing to teach them to use appropriate word processing soft-ware, students are willing to prewrite, write, and revise on the computer, and moreover, they wish to continue to use the computers in our labs throughout their college career.

We are also discovering that students who use computers often write and revise more in all stages of the process. They use prewriting and sentence combining activities more often, they write more drafts, polish their drafts extensively, and let other students read their writing more readily. This may result from the ease of such activities in a computer writing center or from their willingness to try something new. Many of our basic writers have become immune to their own handwritten drafts and no longer pay much attention to them, but because the computer presents their writing in a new, printed format, they must come to terms with it as it looks on the screen. Due to the ease of revising, they seem

more willing to work at improving their writing, with the computer writing center acting as a writing community. They share their writing, often leaning over to see what the person next to them is doing on an assignment. It is difficult to prevent tutors and other students from reading

> **We are also discovering that students who use computers often write and revise more in all stages of the process.**

and commenting on what is displayed on the screen. The neatness of the printed draft pleases the computer writers and results in their showing off their new-found skills both to the teacher and in peer-review groups, where they are much more willing to pass out their printer-generated copies.

University of Texas at El Paso is an open-admissions, minority institution with more than half of the entering freshmen enrolled in develop-mental English courses and referred to the learning assistance center with special writing problems. Our students do not always realize the importance of good writing skills or are not convinced that they are attainable, but most know that computer <u>skills</u> are now at a premium in the job market, and therefore, they are extremely pleased when they have the opportunity to learn computing skills in our labs, and we are extremely pleased when they realize that they can learn to write as well. Most of our students come from families that can't afford to purchase a computer, so the availability of computers in our writing centers gives students the opportunity to learn computing skills that they could not learn other-wise.

Ha introduced computers into our centers and observed our students using them, I can't imagine teaching writing without them. If you are interested in learning more about re-search in the field of computers and writing, I recommend the following books:

Collins, J. and Sommers, E. eds. Writing On-Line: Using Computers in the Teaching of Writing. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1985.

Dalute, C. Writing and Computers. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1985.

Rodrigues, D. and Rodrigues, R Teaching Writing with a Word Processor: Grades 7-13. Urbana, IL: NCTE/ ERIC, 1986.

Wresch, W., ed. The Computer in Composition Instruction. Urbana, IL: NCTE/ ERIC, 1985.

I hope that you will take the plunge by selecting a computer and trying it in your writing center, but for those of you who would rather gradually get your feet wet, my next column will be on selecting the right computer equipment for your center.

(Evelyn Posey is the Coordinator of the Study Skills and Tutorial Service at the University of Texas at El Paso.)

Working with Charlotte: A close look at tutoring the special learner

To begin with, I'd like to introduce you to Charlotte, the nature of her special learning needs, her specific reasons for coming to seek help with writing, the kinds of techniques which seemed to work best with her and her overall progress. A special learner can be any student with a physical or mental handicap that impedes her learn... ability. Charlotte is a severe epileptic who has been under medication to control her epilepsy since she was nine months old. She has never been seizure-free, and she undergoes constant medical revaluation to regulate the epilepsy and the side effects of the medication. In conver-sation with a clinical psychologist who had counseled Charlotte at the university where I work, I learned that Charlotte's problems with her school work could be as much attributed to the effects of her medication as they could to the brain damage which causes the epilepsy in the first place.

Her ability to think is being reduced by her infirmity and by the medication she takes to control her infirmity. Epilepsy is caused by excessive neuron activity in the brain and is controlled by medicine that limits this excessive activity. However, the large amount of the drug necessary to prevent Charlotte from seizing slows down all neuron activity, even that which is necessary for

normal reasoning and thinking. Charlotte experiences a two-fold drain on her cognitive ability, one from the brain damage which causes the epilepsy and the second from the side effects of her medication.

Because of her physical limitations, Charlotte's academic progress in college was slow and difficult. Even though a high school counselor had once written that Charlotte was a solid C+ who had no problems with studies and could do better if she applied herself more, I was assured that her score of 79 on an intelligence test was an accurate estimation of her ability to perform mentally due to the two-fold drain on her cognitive functioning. At the time of our first meeting, she was a twenty-five year old sixth-year senior who was trying to finish up her last two semesters of college so she could graduate. Charlotte's college record documents the determination and perseverance she possessed to get so far along. She had been on probation seven times and suspended from school twice due to her low grades. Charlotte's family's monetary resources were limited, and since she is unable to stand the burden of w o r a n d attending school, financial assistance was a necessity for her to receive a college education. She was able to get funding from Vocational Rehabilitation, but its requirements stipulated that she carry a full load of courses and maintain a two-point GPA. She kept getting bad grades, losing her eligibility, taking a smaller load which her mother paid for, and then getting good enough grades to pull up her average, so she could become eligible again to take a full load and do poorly.

Charlotte had come to the writing center looking for a way to satisfy the university's writing competency examination and write a research paper to finish up an incomplete she had in a psychology class. In essence, Charlotte had two writing tasks which stood in her way of graduation, and she had come for tutoring so she could complete the required writing and graduate. Lacking any formal training with working with someone like Charlotte, I tried a variety of strategies which I had used with other students. Trying to cash in on her oral competency, I early on suggested that she work with a tape recorder that she could talk into and then later write down the thoughts she was able to verbalize. This proved to be a total disaster. Charlotte spent much time trying to get the tape recorder to work, and for some reason she was never successful.

In our first meeting on the research paper,
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which would become the focus of thirty-seven tutoring sessions spread over two semesters, Charlotte brought a computer printout of sources, and we went through the abstracts trying to get a sense of which articles looked most promising for her topic. She also had a special issue of a journal that was devoted to her topic. I showed Charlotte how she could go through the reference page of an article and find more sources. This was probably a mistake. Eventually, she had two full pages of references which she had gleaned from the reference pages of articles she had already read. I asked Charlotte to begin to take notes, but she kept showing up to the tutorial sessions with more sources or plans to get more sources through an additional computer search or interlibrary loan. She was well on her way to having enough source material to write a thesis or dissertation. Since this was to be the standard issue eight to twelve-page paper, I assured her that she had enough sources, and that she had to begin to take notes. Charlotte was seemingly reluctant to move on from one step to another. It was almost as if one type of task cost her so much time and effort that she was reluctant to start all over again with a different activity. Charlotte's lock-step approach made it difficult for her to write a research paper which often requires doing many things at once.

To move her on to the next step, I modeled notetaking and showed her some of my own notes and notecards I had used in a paper I was working on. It was two sessions after that before Charlotte brought any notes with her. At first she only had two, and the next session she brought nine more. Within two weeks of the session where Charlotte showed up with two notecards, she showed me over thirty separate notecards. Charlotte's problems with beginning to take notes were also reflected in other stages in the process of writing a research paper. Just as she resisted notetaking, she was also reluctant to begin writing. One marked difference in working with a special learner such as Charlotte and working with a nonspecial learner is the need for the tutor to provide a structural framework within which the special learner can function. Charlotte lacked experience and know-how about what needed to be done and how to do it. She also required someone to tell her when things should be done, and she needed someone to supervise her while she worked. This is quite a different approach than working with students who have no special needs as learners and writers, since often our immediate job is to make the student take charge of her own writing and achieve a certain degree of independence. With the special learner we must

walk a fine line where we supply the necessary structure without usurping the student's owner-ship of the task or text.

My technique, which sort of developed out of necessity, was for Charlotte to tell me what to say, and for me to write it down. I used to kid her about being her secretary, and I think it made it easier for Charlotte not to have to worry about the graphemic part of the writing process. Usually, Charlotte would bring to the tutorial session some text she had drafted, and then she would talk her way through the text as I wrote down what she wanted to say. Also I had to help her keep focused. She often drifted off task, and I would remind her to focus. On some very unproductive days it seemed that all I said during a session was, "focus." This structuring of our tutorial sessions was able to provide Charlotte with the type of support she needed in order to produce acceptable college-level prose. Also, this structure freed Charlotte from the demand of physically having to write, and it gave her a built-In way to revise, since she was able to talk through text she had already written.

While Charlotte had to work outside of our sessions, this work needed to be something that she could easily accomplish on her own. If the task was too difficult, Charlotte wouldn't tell me ahead of time so we could modify it. Instead, she would just show up without any work for our next session. However, Charlotte did feel comfortable in writing down her ideas, especially since she knew she would have an opportunity to talk through her draft while I wrote it down. At first, I was worried that working so closely with Charlotte would mean that I would supply parts of the actual text, and at times especially if we had had a particularly long session and I was tired, I would find myself doing some of the actual writing. However, Charlotte let me know when I wrote down my words and not hers. Another interesting sideline in our working together is that at first I had to tell Charlotte when a section of text wasn't clear. After awhile, as Charlotte read through her draft to tell me what to write down, she began to comment on what was unclear and needed to be rewritten. She never got to the point where she could revise completely without my help, but she did become much more skilled at editing our rough parts of her writing. I found that Charlotte's text needed less and less talking out. In fact, the best illustration of her improvement rests in the amount of work she accomplished. It took from October to Spring Break in the middle of March for Charlotte to produce five pages, yet she was able

to hand in a final copy, fully referenced, A- re-search paper during the first week of May.

This spurt of writing growth between the middle of March and the first week in May should dispel any sense that Charlotte moved toward her goal in a straightforward, orderly fashion. Just as Charlotte's overall academic record showed a series of victories and defeats so too our work together was marked by times when she seemed to progress so strongly that I felt she was well on her way to finishing, and then there were times when I thought we would never get done with that paper. The individual tutoring sessions followed a sort of alternating pattern between positive, hard-working times of accomplishment and frustrating, irritating sessions when " focus" was all I seemed able to say to Charlotte. It's hard to speculate as to why Charlotte's progress seemed so erratic. It might just be that writing growth is an uneven activity. The important thing about the sporadic nature of Charlotte's progress was its effect on my expectations for her. Because of my lack of training and experience with working with someone who had such special learning needs, I think I overestimated how far she had come and how quickly she could continue to progress.

In my work with Charlotte I assumed the role of providing the structure in Charlotte's quest to finish the research paper and move closer to graduation. I also acted like a counselor or advisor and investigated the possibility of getting the supervisor of the writing competency requirement to allow Charlotte to fulfill the writing requirement for graduation if she could be certified as a competent writer through her paper for her psychology professor. The finishing of this psychology paper, then, took on even stronger significance. It be-came one of the last major obstacles for graduation, and as Charlotte moved closer to completion, the pressure began to mount for her. At one point in our work together, Charlotte showed up late for a tutorial, and she was very agitated and frustrated about not being able to get some task completed and about having misplaced a book she had borrowed from a staff member in our office. This was not the first time Charlotte had vented her feelings tome, but it certainly was the strongest emotional display I had seen. I listened to her for awhile, hoping she would sort of just talk herself out. When I thought she was finished, I tried to move her towards our task for the day, This was a mistake. She didn't have any work done, and she turned her anger toward me, accusing me of treating her like a five-year-old. She got up and stormed out of my office.

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I can remember at the time feeling rather bewildered because she was so close to getting done. I know now that I was pushing Charlotte like I push myself when I can see the end of a project, and I sort of sprint to the end. In a later conversation with Charlotte, I learned that she never expected to complete the paper. I feel now that some of the conflict between us could have been avoided if I would have had a more realistic set of expectations which were based upon Charlotte's needs and abilities rather than on my own or upon my experience with students who do not have special learning needs.

About a week after the big blowout Charlotte contacted me, and we began working toward the inevitable completion of her paper. As I have already indicated, Charlotte finished the paper and got an A-. Her smile as she told me about handing it to her instructor was definitely a high point of my tutoring year. Also, Charlotte's instructor certified her as a competent writer, and Charlotte has fulfilled the writing requirement for graduation. She received her degree last December.

This ends Charlotte's story as a student,

but it also opens up some speculation about the rest of the story. Charlotte still lives with her mother, and she is dependent on her for day-to-day living the same way she was dependent on me for the process of writing a research paper. Charlotte worked for the Kemp presidential campaign on our university campus, and she has tentative plans to finish two courses to receive her Gerontology certificate so she can get a job working with the elderly. She has also mentioned the fact that she's going to make an appointment so we can work on her resume and application letters. I have learned to be more realistic in my expectations for Charlotte, and I have some doubts about her ability to gain and keep employment, especially in a professional position. However, my work with Charlotte has also affirmed any belief in the power of individual determination and perseverance. I've seen what Charlotte can accomplish with a little help.

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