

# The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 16, Numbers 9-10

May-June, 1992

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

Newsletter articles normally appear in the order in which they have been received. Thus, it was not clever planning on my part but serendipity which led to a succession of three articles in this month's issue, all by tutors, which are particularly interesting in the ways that they interact and reinforce each other. Shoshana Konstant, Eric Hobson, and Ellen Keane all write from a tutor's perspective, sharing what they have learned about how to tutor, what questions they ask themselves in order to improve their effectiveness, and what they conclude about the nature of learning and of tutoring writing.

Since so many of us end our school year in May, this issue is an experiment in combining the usual May and June issues into one longer one. Let me know if you think we should retain June issues or if they are more likely to gather dust in your mailbox until you return in the fall. With this final issue for this volume, I wish us all a delightfully languid summer with ample amounts of high quality R & R. Until next fall.....

•Muriel Harris, editor

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## College/High School Connections

Why don't high school/college writing center collaborations work? People outside education question the lack of collaboration between the schools and colleges. They say, "Aren't we working toward the same goal—the improved education of people?" Although the problems may be obvious ones, educators frequently overlook or underestimate the ones that stare them in the face. The following list reflects problems heard from secondary and college people throughout the country:

### **Problem 1: Lack of mutual understanding of roles as educators.**

Public school teachers have been "trained" as educators. College teachers vary in their backgrounds as "trained" teachers with many moving directly from undergraduate to graduate school with college-level assistantships involving lectures only.

Without similar goals and desires to improve the quality of education, collaboration will not get off the ground.

**Problem 2: Time restraints.**

College schedules allow for more flexibility to schedule meetings during the regular school year, while secondary teachers must follow specified full-day schedules five days a week. For summer planning, good teachers on all levels need to have dates early in order to schedule priorities.

**Problem 3: Pre-established roles of participants.**

In designing grant proposals, college teachers propose themselves as directors earning the larger fees, while the secondary teachers end up doing the work. The college people take the credit and the salary until the funds run out. After making a major commitment to the project, is it then dropped?

**Problem 4: Pecking order hierarchy.**

Related to the previous problem is the one of college personnel contacting secondary schools referring to their titles, degrees, and desire to teach "those" people how to do something. The secondary teachers then become defensive and resentful. In reality, many of the secondary people are earning more money than the college people who want to come "down" and teach them a thing or two. Condescension offends as much as groveling!

**Problem 5: Why get involved with another institution?**

Every good educator could easily spend twenty-four hours a day trying to do a good job. If part of that time is devoted to sleeping, eating, and trying to live like a human being, little time is left to plan and participate in projects with another institution. Besides, the involvement could mean rewriting existing curricula, lesson plans, etc. Without a common reason to become involved, collaboration will not begin.

Well, enough of the negative—I'm getting too depressed. Let's talk about the positive side and what makes school/college collaboration work. The following list indicates the advantages of collaboration:

**Advantage 1: Interactive training of tutors.**

The selection of tutors, definition of their role in the writing center, and their training determine their effectiveness. If tutors from high schools and colleges are trained together, both groups will learn more from the expertise of the other. As one of my high school tutors told some college tutors, "When a high school freshman reads the paper of a senior and says, 'I don't understand what you are trying to say,' that is just as effective as a senior asking the freshman, 'What is your purpose and who is your audience?'"

**Advantage 2: Exchange of ideas to survive the politics of education.**

Many collaborations involve the teachers as well as the tutors exchanging classes. If both writing center directors have a common purpose and a clear sense of their own identities, then the exchange becomes a support system as well. Besides, directors may share information from professional works they have read and from conferences they have attended.

**Advantage 3: Focus on clear goals.**

Each of us tends to avoid refocusing our  
(cont. on page 8)

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**Editor:** Muriel Harris, English, Purdue University, 1356 Heavilon, W. Lafayette, IN 47907-1356 (317-494-3723)

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

## The Writing Center Meets English 102: Truth, Consequences, and Other Stuff

Where I teach at Widener University, we get a great variety of students—some come to the Writing Center with earnest grins, pencils or pens ready, questions fired. Others want the Writing Center staffperson to “fix” them, to turn writing into the aspirin that cures the writing headache. We cannot fix them—we are not aspirins! But we can shake them a little, help them to pay attention.

In many colleges and universities, the entering freshman takes English 101, writes an assortment of papers, perhaps including some kind of research assignment. This is followed by English 102, where the student writes about central works in poetry, fiction, and drama. Let’s face it—after a full semester of 101, many students enter English 102 with less than enthusiastic attitudes. For many students, this will be their last writing class—and many will say “Good riddance!” as soon as it’s over.

In addition, many of these 102 students have little or no background in reading—not just literary works, but in any reading beyond magazines and lyrics on album covers. They are resistant to the instructor who, class by class, demands their attention. Many feel alienated—not just from English, but from any sort of interchange in language which will not allow them to remain passive readers. Passivity is fun: a huge pizza, a tabloid, an MTV hit.

Of course, literature which has any life to it whispers: Be careful. I’m going to get under your skin and you can’t stop me! So many English 102 teachers know this class is often very silent. How much students want the instructor to “tell” them how to feel about literature, to slip the formula equation into the poem, story, or play and have the print-out reveal the key to a multiple-choice test. Poets laugh, sadly.

Literary discussions never lead to these print-outs. They only lead, hopefully, to more questions, more alertness. This makes students nervous, and often they will come to the Writing Center, a huge ribbon of HELP! surrounding them. Our job is to help them, we want to help them, but often this is no easy task.

Many students do not know *how* to ask questions or how to respond to them. As Writing Center staffmembers, we are not in their classes; we cannot know what their teachers have said. Sometimes the assignments may seem vague to us because we have no way of knowing what a particular teacher is asking of the student. We live in a guesswork world. This is, however, not necessarily a negative—we can turn confusion into clarity.

The way to do this is through intensive (though not threatening) questioning of the student. Many students know more than they think they do. A Writing Center staffperson may have an opportunity which the classroom teacher does not have—the one-on-one dialogue. Because we have no grade hanging over their heads, we can draw them out. They can speak more freely with us because nobody can lose.

A word of caution: it is probably unwise to pummel the student with remarks like “Tell me, what exactly did your teacher say? Weren’t you listening? Where is the assignment sheet?” We may desire this, but it is, ultimately, counter-productive. All their lives teachers have been the Great Cornerers, the Finder-Outers. In the Writing Center, we can subvert that. We can offer bridges, not recriminations. We are not parents; perhaps, we are not even “teachers” in the authoritarian sense. We can offer not just a blind enthusiasm, but an encouragement based on hard work.

Still, we do need to know what the parameters of an assignment are. Sometimes I listen to what a student tells me about the topic upon which he/she is supposed to write, and I start by revealing personal experiences (often not very flattering) about the difficulties of writing about literature. If the student is particularly nervous, I try to defuse that fear with humor and admissions of my own fears of writing about literature. English 102 is NEVER a snap course—they know it, the teachers know it, and the Writing Center staffperson knows it. Fear inhibits real writing, but it can be directed toward a confrontation with the question the English 102 teacher is asking the student.

This fear is natural. In the presence of great art, fear is a given. Writers, no matter how "expert," feel a kind of silence before works of integrity. It is difficult to communicate this to English 102 students, many of whom may be business or nursing majors. But is this fear a problem? Yes and no. When we are afraid, we often are most ready to receive help—whatever it takes to alleviate our fear. What an opportunity for the Writing Center staffmember! Ultimately, we want them to partake in the issues about which the English 102 teacher is asking them. We want them to be alert.

This alertness may not be easy to bring to light. Unfortunately, many of them have examined literature only through the eyes of their teachers, whether they be high school or college. They wait for what the teacher has to tell them—"this is the way you read this poem; this is the "theme" behind this story." Their own opinions on a given work may have been ignored or unsolicited.

In the Writing Center, there is no way any staffperson can have read every story, poem, or play assigned in the many sections of English 102. Therefore, we cannot be the person who "tells" them how to react to a certain work. This is, ultimately, an enviable position. Like the student who is searching for meaning, for words, we can search with them. We can do this by diffusing their fears, taking their doubts seriously, and helping them to formulate ideas which can lead to a workable thesis statement.

Sometimes what the student needs is someone to help him/her to remember what was actually said during the classroom discussions. What a student has written in the notebook may be a poor representation of what occurred in class. Still, before cohesive writing can occur, the student must have a grasp not only of the work he/she is examining, but of what the topic is asking him/her to probe.

Many English 102 students, despite warnings from teachers, think writing about literature means, essentially, parroting a plot summary. Plot is safer territory, similar to a multiple-choice test. Most questions posed by 102 teachers de-emphasize plot—a knowledge of plot is either assumed or saved for exams. For an instructor in the Writing Center, however, asking a student that basic question

"What happened in this story? This poem? This play?" may be a good starting point. As they begin to articulate the work, they are, in my view, engaged in the act of writing.

Like the student, we too need to read closely the topic question posed by the teacher. We need to center our discussion around the question itself. Whether or not we have read the given work is not crucial. The staffperson can ask the student what he/she thinks the topic is asking him/her to investigate. Students may answer passively: a pair of shrugging shoulders, a grunt, a sense of waiting for us to *tell* them what to do. We can't. Our job is usually not to *tell*—it's to bring them into a more complete involvement with the assignment. We can add focus.

But "focus" is often too general. Many students want us to be "English Teacher Number Two," the substitute for the classroom teacher, which, of course, we can never be. Even if we know the story, poem, or play, even if we have assigned similar topics for our 102 students, we are not in the student's classroom. We do not know the texture of the discussions, another teacher's rhythm.

The fear of literature is often superseded by the fear of writing—and suddenly the student is back in any writing-oriented class. That many of them find the works of poetry, fiction, and drama difficult is only part of the dilemma. Writing, as many of them found in English 101, is tough work. English 102 (writing about literature) is not necessarily harder for them but they may *think* it is—that is often the problem the student brings to us in the Writing Center.

Many times I listen to a student in the Writing Center say, "I just didn't understand this piece, and I don't understand what he/she wants from me." I ask them to show me the assignment sheet. I ask them to discuss what it is about the story, poem, or play which confuses them. Even if it is a work with which I am unfamiliar, I ask the question. Any move toward articulation is a move toward writing.

Sometimes I wish I could tell them what to write, especially if their paper is about a work I love. It's easy for me to get off the track (meaning: their writing) and to talk about my feelings about the work they are trying to come

to grips with. But, ultimately, what is it that we want these students to take away with them from the Writing Center? It's surely not our opinions or views of the work, but their opinions, rooted in a text, expressed from a text, that matter more.

The tough part is that their "opinions" are often no more than class notes, if that, no more than what their teacher suggests they feel. Many of them sit in class, scared to make a verbal contribution, scared they're going to fail. Some come to the Writing Center to avoid just such an outcome as this.

Their fear becomes our chance. In front of any great work of literature (writing, when it's good, being an unpredictable thing from the start) both the student and the Writing Center staffperson share the same confusions. It is no shame to admit this to the student. The more they can express doubt, the more chance we have to help clarify.

As someone who works with these students both in the classroom and in the Writing Center, I am doubly familiar with these fears. Perhaps education must be, ultimately, a confrontation of fear. What a student would never think of bringing up before his/her classmates he/she may be more willing to discuss with an individual in the Writing Center. This does not turn us into band-aids; rather, we are hallways the student can walk through to articulate ideas.

Most 102 students are not English majors—for many, this will be the final class in which they will have to consider (and write about) significant literary works. If it is their last chance, it may also be our last chance in the Writing Center to help them to enhance their writing skills, which, clearly, does not mean only their grammar skills, but their thinking skills. A question is at the root of our work as Writing Center staffmembers. The question is not "ours" as much as it is anyone's who is interested in the concerns of the writers about which the student is expected to formulate ideas. The question is mercury, melting ice, and rhythm. By probing the student's imagination (not like a surgeon but more like a hang-glider over vast unexplored areas) the Writing Center staffperson can help clarify not just the ideas in a paper, but the ideas a student confronts through the particular assigned work.

Great work is never great because critics insist it is. Great work endures and digs under our skin because the language takes place in our bones, crotch, elbow, and breath. Of course the student is scared—great work is, by definition, scary. Language, when it comes alive, has all the oomph of an alligator slashing its tail. Often the student chooses to believe that such a journey is only meant for teachers; how untrue! In the Writing Center, we can help the student to understand that both he/she and we are journeying toward the same goal—articulation. The study of literature is not that of mathematical theorems; rather, it is the acceptance of the question, the push toward clarity, the acceptance of diversity.

I find it interesting how often when I am working with one of these students that I *learn* from them. I must discard my assumptions and the lecture notes of my former professors and let the student speak. I stop being "the dispenser" of knowledge and let the conversation do the shaping—the student shapes the dialogue as much as we do.

Kenneth Pobo  
Widener University  
Chester, PA

### "wcenter@TTUVM1"

If you have access to bitnet or internet, you are invited to join a national electronic mail group devoted to a discussion of writing center practice and theory. To subscribe, send a message to "listserv@ttuvm1" and, if you are on internet, add ".bitnet" at the end of this address. At the "to" prompt, write the following message: subscribe wcenter (first name) (last name). To unsubscribe, send the following message to the same address: unsubscribe wcenter (first name) (last name). To send messages once you've joined, send to "wcenter@ttuvm1" and again add ".bitnet" if you are on internet. To get the e-mail addresses of those on the list, send the following message: rev wcenter.

## Multi-sensory Tutoring for Multi-sensory Learners

The field of learning disabilities seems fraught with conflict; some experts say that learning disabilities are strictly a result of neurological problems, while others will swear that at least some are developmental in nature. Armed camps vehemently defend their positions about whether to teach to the student's strengths or weaknesses. Whether or not these battles will ever be won by one side or the other is anyone's guess (though technological advances in the ability to study brain functioning do seem to be revealing more and more minute damage that was previously undetectable—score one for the neurologists). But I am not a neurologist, nor am I a developmental theorist. I am a tutor, and I'm not sure I care who's right or who wins. The causes of learning disabilities are important to know in order to remediate the problem (if you are of the camp who believes that they are a problem), but whether or not to remediate is another whole argument in itself, and remediation isn't my job, anyway.

Defining a learning disability is as difficult and controversial as everything else about the field. For purposes of our discussion here, it is a perceptual or processing problem, possibly neurologically based, which results in the person acting on perceptions different from those of most people. More simply put, learning disabled (LD) people might read "raisin" as "raisin" not because they don't know the word, but merely because they don't see the difference—similar to the way some people can't perceive the difference between red and green. The characteristic of LD students that is easiest to forget and most important to remember is that they possess an average IQ.

One way of dealing with learning disabilities that has proven helpful to educators is to determine how a student learns best and to teach to that. Assuming that learning involves taking in and processing information, tutors who employ this method try to present information through the student's strongest perceptual channel (i. e., way of taking in information; "channel" is just jargon that makes you sound like you know what you're talking about).

The primary channels are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual learners can best process and remember information that they see, be it in the form of charts, diagrams, pictures, or printed text. Auditory learners do best with verbal explanations or discussions. Kinesthetic learners need to move or do things; this type of learning, being the most unfamiliar to and unused by most of us, is the most difficult to explain.

We all have our own preferred ways of learning, and these often vary with the task. For example, I can never do my ballet routines correctly unless I do them while the teacher demonstrates, but I can sometimes figure out the dynamics of an ecosystem just by staring at it long enough. The former is an example of kinesthetic learning, while the latter is visual. I am primarily a visual learner: I prefer to read things for myself or read along when someone reads to me, as I have trouble understanding what other people read to me.

Many learning disabled students know how they learn best and will tell you at the beginning of the tutoring session if you ask. It is worth taking the time to find out, particularly with students whom you work with repeatedly. Why spend twenty minutes verbally explaining something to a visual learner? Why not teach to the student's strengths? The technical term for this approach, by the way, is Aptitude-Treatment Interaction (ATI), and one of the chief criticisms of it is that it becomes too formulaic: Learning style A + Teaching style A = Success. This trait is also, of course, its most attractive feature for some—the same people, I suspect, who want a rule for every possible use of a comma.

But punctuation is most often intuitive, and so is tutoring. The best tutoring sometimes occurs when all theory goes out the window. The single most important piece of advice I can give as someone experienced in tutoring LD students is do whatever works. Do anything to get the message across. I have ranted, raved, and stood on desks. Tutoring LD students is a chance to exercise one's

creativity. Standard explanations or tutoring techniques may prove to be completely worthless for some students; in fact, what worked wonders for one learning disabled student may leave the next nonplussed, even confused. Don't despair. Try something else. Have patience; the student is infinitely more frustrated than you are. Try every possible way you can think of to get your message across and if they all fail, then try something else.

Try ways of reaching the student through more than one channel at a time. Use combinations of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic techniques—the multisensory approach. Say it and draw it; read text aloud; use color to illustrate things. For example, when I wanted to show a student how often he had used simple sentences, we underlined simple sentences in red, complex in blue, and compound in green. Then we taped the paper to the wall, stood ten feet away, and saw that the majority of the paper was red. Nothing I could ever have said to this man would have made as strong an impression as this did.

Knowing a student's learning strengths is useful, not in order to apply specific techniques but as general background information. Being aware, for instance, that someone is a visual learner might remind you to draw diagrams of organizational patterns when discussing them or to highlight in color all topic sentences; however, it doesn't mean that you must do all these things every time. The following lists are meant to be suggestions, not requirements. Do what works with each individual. Most learning disabled college students can learn most things when presented with information in an appropriate manner.

### **Techniques For Tutoring Learning Disabled Students**

#### **I. Visual techniques**

- Present information visually whenever possible. Use charts, diagrams, pictures, graphs, or concrete visual examples.
- Work from written material when possible, pointing to the information being discussed.
- Use a chalkboard to illustrate points.
- When possible, use colors (chalk or pens) to differentiate material: to highlight topic

sentences, to put in punctuation, to distinguish between fact and inference, etc.

- Use gestures when explaining a point. Be animated—point, circle the information, draw a picture, act it out—involve yourself in the information.
- Use concrete visual images when possible.
- Make sure the student leaves the session with a visual representation, such as notes and/or diagrams, of what has been discussed verbally.

#### **II. Auditory techniques**

- Use auditory reinforcement of visually presented material. Read notes and papers aloud while pointing to the material.
- Verbally discuss all major points for reinforcement.
- Have the student read aloud.
- Encourage the student to use a tape recorder for tutoring sessions and classes so material can be reviewed at home.
- Have the student study with a tape recorder. Information should be read aloud and played back several times.
- Encourage the student to use a tape recorder to do written assignments, dictating ideas or entire sentences which can be transcribed later.

#### **III. Kinesthetic techniques**

- Allow the student to do the writing, copying, underlining, highlighting, moving.
- Make rearranging of items a physical activity for the student. Instead of drawing arrows to indicate where a sentence or paragraph should be moved to, put phrases, clauses, ideas, sentences, or paragraphs on separate pieces of paper or cards which the student can physically rearrange.
- Act things out and/or have the student act them out.
- Have the student copy (write over) informa-

tion to be remembered.

- Use gestures when speaking and point to the material being discussed or read. Have students point as they read or discuss as well.
- If students have problems remembering terms used in tutoring discussion, develop with students a system of gestures they can use instead.

#### **IV. Multi-sensory techniques**

- Present information in as many ways as possible: say it and write it, draw it and discuss it, discuss it and act it out.
- Develop color, abbreviation, sound, or gesture systems for concepts which the student understands but can't remember names for.
- Combine techniques whenever and to whatever extent possible. For example, have the student read something aloud while pointing to or highlighting it; thus, the student is getting visual, auditory, and kinesthetic input.
- Be animated; involve the student in the session and encourage active participation.
- Be creative. Try to think of new ways to convey what you are expressing. Don't repeat the same explanation two or three or seven times; the student is no more likely to understand it the seventh time than the first. Find ways of communicating through the student's strongest perceptual channels.

Shoshana Beth Konstant  
Silver Springs, MD

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## **College/High School Connections**

(cont. from page 2)

goals and clearly stating them for others to know and understand. By working with another institution, both directors are constantly aware of their own goals and those of each other. Work becomes more purposeful.

#### **Advantage 4: Shared expenses.**

With two institutions planning programs, costs are cut measurably and divided between the institutions. Rather than investing at two institutions for training sessions on new equipment, for instance, staff from both could be trained at one facility.

#### **Advantage 5: Intellectual development.**

Through a variety of combined activities, the students and staff of both institutions may be exposed to new intellectual experiences and challenges. For example, the director at one institution may be involved in poetry readings, national judging of contests, or consulting work which may be of interest to the other. Involvement in the profession opens many new doors.

Through academic alliances, National Writing Project sites, and individual collaborative efforts, directors of writing centers at all academic levels are trying to negotiate working relationships that will improve the quality of education for students, staff, and institutions. The resources that educators share become part of an ongoing nurturing process in the successful writing center.

Pamela Farrell  
The McCallie School  
Chattanooga, TN

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## Tutors' Column

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### Warning: Tutoring May Make You a Researcher

I used to sit back after a bustling late afternoon shift in the Writing Center and enjoy the residual adrenaline still working its peculiar effects on my nervous system. Now I sit and replay snippets of conferences that I participated in or simply passed on my way to get to another student. And I do not simply replay those images; I replay them with a critical eye. I look for clues to why certain of my colleagues are more effective tutors than others, and how that effectiveness is transferred to those colleagues of mine who joined the Writing Center staff just seven weeks ago—tutors who can now talk writing one-on-one with the best of them. I look for clues to how I can be a more effective writing tutor. Simply put, I do not consider myself a writing center tutor anymore, but rather a writing center tutor/researcher.

This move is one that I recognized only upon examining what it is that I do as part of a writing center's staff. It is, however, a move every conscientious tutor makes, consciously or unconsciously. Whenever we ask what we can do to improve our performance as writing tutors, we become writing center tutor/researchers. Whenever we either observe our colleagues' tutoring sessions or help to train new tutors by allowing them to sit in on our tutoring sessions, we become writing center tutor/researchers. The whenevers are legion.

The tell-tale evidence of our shifts from tutors to tutor/researchers is that we frame questions around which to guide both our further questions about tutoring in general and our tutoring in particular; we no longer are satisfied simply to tutor and go home tired, yet content. By taking our tutoring jobs seriously, we necessarily improve our tutoring; however, we also begin to create a theoretical base upon which to build a tutoring philosophy. We begin to understand what collaboration means, not just how collaboration is done. We begin to fathom how conversation creates knowledge,

not just that talk is something we are told to do as tutors. We begin....

And such a theoretical base is essential to tutors' effectiveness as members of writing centers' staffs, and possibly as future writing center directors—the future success and the continued growth of writing centers in American education rests on dedicated writing tutors moving into writing center administration and tutor training. Without some conceptual center from which to ask further questions about what it is we do and are supposed to do as writing tutors, we simply ask questions into a void; we rely on luck or volume to provide answers applicable to our situations as real tutors in real writing centers in real academic environments.

Being a writing center tutor/researcher, however, doesn't mean that I have given up my days off in the writing center, and am now omnipresent, notebook in hand, counting and recording, analyzing and evaluating everything that goes on there. Far from it. What I do is keep fresh questions circulating as I come into contact with writers and fellow tutors, questions intended to draw my attention to particular facets of the tutoring encounter that currently fascinate me. And as I ride the bus home in the evening, I replay my day in the writing center, hoping to learn something new about the whole experience of being a writing tutor, hoping to come across some tidbit that I can bandy about with my fellow tutors over coffee the next day in the joint attempt to improve what it is that we do in the writing center.

Eric H. Hobson  
Tutor

The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN

(Starting next fall Eric Hobson will direct the writing center at Southwest Missouri State University and work with the WAC program there.)

## Perceptions of Tutors and Students Differ

It is not uncommon in the Learning Resource Center (LRC) to hear a tutor say to a confused student, "Wait, let me explain that another way." One of the most difficult aspects of any type of tutoring is the tutoring process itself. Just knowing the material is not sufficient; a tutor needs to possess enough ability and insight to get the material across to a student.

Unfortunately, no two students have ever walked into the LRC with the same learning style. What might constitute a perfect explanation for one student may cause only confusion for another student struggling with the same subject matter. "We are always in a process of finding out more about how students learn," says Kevin O'Connor, Director of the LRC Writing Program.

A questionnaire comparing tutor and student perceptions of the tutoring sessions was distributed in the LRC last spring. The questionnaire asked tutors and students to evaluate the usefulness of those strategies employed in the session. After comparing the students' and the tutors' questionnaires, the Center noted considerable contrast in the responses of the two groups.

"We found that our tutors weren't realizing how valuable students found certain strategies," O'Connor said. For example, while visual strategies, such as outlines, graphs, and charts were ranked the third most valuable

learning aid by the students, tutors judged this strategy twelfth in their order of usefulness. In addition, the tutors ranked paraphrasing as the second most useful strategy, while the student group ranked it seventh.

From the questionnaire the Center has been able to single out certain problem areas. For instance, "these two examples show that often tutors who are verbally oriented," O'Connor explains, "may tend to use language as a tool for learning, whereas for the student, language may have been the original problem." The responses in the survey indicate that frequently a strategy which may be useful for a tutor isn't necessarily useful for a student.

"What the questionnaire tells us is that we need to learn as many strategies as possible," O'Connor concludes. The LRC tutors have found that the most effective way of discovering new learning strategies is in the sessions themselves. In a tutoring situation where the phrase "Do you know what I mean?" seems to repeat of its own will, it is likely that the tutor is failing to put a useful strategy to work and should continue "explaining things in different ways" until an effective one is found.

Ellen Keane  
Peer Tutor  
Loyola Marymount University  
Los Angeles, CA

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### Wanted: Writing Lab Humor, Graffiti, Quotes of the Day.....

Do you have any writing lab cartoons your tutors have drawn? Do you invite students to have some fun with writing? Does your lab collect bits of humor, quotes, tutoring jokes, and so on that you'd be willing to share with the rest of us? There is usually a little space here and there in the newsletter where such fillers can be included and enjoyed by the rest of us.

## Writing Assistants in Writing-Emphasis Courses: Toward Some Working Guidelines

The Boise State University Writing Center has for some time been involved in writing-across-the-curriculum. We distribute a monthly broadside for faculty on writing, now in its fifth year of publication, and recently we began "attaching" writing assistants to several experimental writing-emphasis courses. With the W-courses, an interesting problem has developed: instructors of the courses have frequently shown confusion about how to employ the WA's assigned to them. In this article I'd like to describe the problems we've encountered, and then present the set of guidelines (see pages 12-13) we developed to help W-course instructors and WA's work together.

Our faculty training in writing-across-the-curriculum has come in waves, or rather tides, flowing and ebbing with the availability of funds. In the first tide, several years ago, Roy Fox (the Director of Writing) and I trained 36 faculty in two summer seminars under an NEH grant. In the second, Roy worked with 24 faculty in semester-long seminars, preparing them specifically to teach W-courses. Some faculty from the earlier seminars came back to update their knowledge.

The seminars have had a dramatic effect on the participants. As one music professor remarked to me, "For the first time in my life, I'm seeing what my students are saying in their papers, and I'm responding to the content." Most participants come to understand the ultimate effect of WAC: thinking about writing forces them to totally rethink their approaches to teaching. When a communication professor told a follow-up gathering of seminar participants, "Because of the seminars I've become a better teacher," there were nods of agreement all around.

When these instructors were near the end of each seminar, I went to one of their meetings to offer the Writing Center's services and explain what writing assistants might do for their W-courses. Any professor who wanted a WA to support students in their writing efforts just had to ask, and we would provide

somebody—or the professors could nominate students they knew from their own classes. We had five takers. Two of the instructors found their own WA candidates; the other three took on WA's who were already working in the Writing Center. The two new candidates went through our standard screening process and became part of the Writing Center, attending the weekly staff meetings and doing other tutoring when not occupied with W-classes.

The experience of the five WA's with the W-course instructors turned out very mixed, both in nature and in success. At one extreme, a professor ended up not using his WA at all. Using writing in classes was so new to him, he wasn't ready to work the WA into his plans. At the other extreme, a professor placed far too many demands on his WA. He had her working with three different classes, all of whom were required to write journals as well as a number of formal projects. She was expected to read almost everything the students wrote. The instructor once even sent her to the library to track down a case of suspected plagiarism.

Both these extremes represented a failure on our part to adequately inform the instructors how to use the WA's and how not to use them. We'd assumed very wrongly that since the seminar participants had become so knowledgeable about writing, they would also know how to use a writing assistant. Even for the three instructors between the extremes, there was some confusion or hesitation about how the WA's should be helping them and their students. The Business Law instructor used his WA mainly to consult with planning writing assignments and to facilitate peer-response groups, but none of his students went to the WA for individual conferences. The Intro to Music instructor's WA was a music major; she had difficulty separating her tutoring in music (for which she was paid separately) from her tutoring in writing.

Before the first semester was over, I met with the five WA's and the Director of Writing to work out some guidelines for faculty who wished to employ writing assistants. What

Boise State University  
Writing Center  
LA-220, phone 385-3585

## Guide to Employing a Writing Assistant in a Writing-Emphasis Course

### *What is a Writing Assistant?*

A Writing Assistant (WA) is an upper-division or graduate student who has been trained to aid others with their writing. Potential WA's are usually nominated by faculty because of their superior writing ability and interpersonal skills. Before they are selected, they must be interviewed and must provide references, samples of their writing, and written statements explaining why they are interested in tutoring writing.

All WA's are members of the Writing Center staff. Their training is continuous; they receive an initial three- to six-hour orientation; after that, they attend weekly training meetings throughout the school year. Their work is periodically monitored by means of audiotaped tutoring sessions and conferences with the Writing Center Director.

Some WA's work with more than one instructor in the same department.

### *What role does a Writing Assistant play?*

WA's serve three essential functions:

- Consultant to the instructor on designing writing assignments, preparing students to carry them out, and responding to student writing.
- Audience for students who wish to talk about difficulties they are having with their written assignments; also for students who are hesitant to approach the instructor.
- Guide for students in developing and revising their drafts.

If an instructor makes use of a WA's potential, the result will be clearer assignments and substantially better writing from the students.

### *How do I find a Writing Assistant?*

You may already have a student in mind you'd like to employ. If so, call the Writing Center and arrange for the student to go through the certification process. If you have no one in mind, call and request a WA. As soon as the Writing Center Director finds a staff member willing to take the job, the three of you will meet to discuss your course plans and what you will expect the WA to do.

### *How can I make the best use of a Writing Assistant?*

1. At the beginning of the semester, give the WA your syllabus and discuss your plans for writing assignments.
2. Introduce the WA to your class and explain specifically how the class is to use the WA—for individual conferences, group conferences, responses to drafts, etc.
3. Give students each paper assignment in writing so that they and the WA will have concrete directions to work from.
4. Give out major assignments at least two weeks before a draft is due and four weeks before the final copy is due. This will give students time to work with the WA and (or) give the WA time to respond to drafts in writing.
5. Give the WA a sample paper that fulfills the assignment well. Annotate it in the margins to indicate features your students should emulate. You might also distribute copies of the annotated paper to your class.
6. Have the WA conduct workshops in class to lead students through the necessary steps in developing their papers.

7. Have the WA help with student drafts. There are a number of ways this can be done.
  - a. Collect all the drafts and have the WA respond to them in writing. (Part of the grade should depend on each student's handing in a complete draft on the due date.)
  - b. Have the students read and respond to each other's drafts in class; the WA can help you monitor the process and offer advice to students.
  - c. Have the students meet individually with the WA. Usually, in this instance, the student will read a draft to the WA, who will give feedback on what works and what needs work. NOTE: Students should always have something written for the WA to respond to, if only a partial draft.
  - d. Have the students meet with the WA in small writing-support groups outside of class. In these groups they read and respond to each other's drafts under the WA's guidance.

Note: Options c. and d. will usually not work unless students are required to do them as part of the grade for the assignment.

### ***Are there ways I should not use a Writing Assistant?***

Yes. There are things WA's are not meant—and not trained—to do. Used in the wrong way, a WA is rendered ineffective and may be forced into unfair ethical dilemmas.

- *WA's do not respond to finished papers, submitted for grades.* They respond only to work in progress, such as drafts. They should not be used to relieve an instructor's paper load, or to track down suspected cases of plagiarism, etc. In other words, WA's are not prepared to act as hired readers or graders.
- *WA's do not "correct" or edit papers for students.* Their primary job is to help students with "higher-order" concerns, such as focus, development, voice, and organization.

They will give guidance, when needed, in "lower-order" concerns such as sentence structure, word choice, spelling, punctuation, and documentation, but that is not their primary function.

- *WA's do not respond to whole sets of informal writings, such as journals.* Informal writings mainly provide information on how the students are learning; they are not written "performances." Responding to them lies in the domain of the instructor.

### ***The work status of Writing Assistants***

WA's work either for internship credit or for pay. In either case, they have an average of five hours per week available to work with W-courses. All of them keep regular hours in the Writing Center and do other tutoring when not working for W-courses. At times they may "borrow" hours from a light week, when there isn't much to do, and add them to a heavy week. If WA's know in advance when they will be needed for more W-course work, they can arrange to juggle their hours in the Writing Center.

### ***Internship credit***

Credit is usually given through the English Department. However, if the WA's major is in your discipline, perhaps an internship might be arranged through your department.

### ***Pay***

1. WA's are paid out of funds from the English Department and Student Special Services. Sometimes the Administration is able to contribute some extra funding. But even at best, the budget is limited.
2. Try to secure funds from your department to help pay the WA. Call the Writing Center for information on the current pay scale. Some WA's are eligible to draw work-study funds from your department.

If you require the WA to attend all or most class meetings, then special compensation must be arranged in the form of internship or pay from your department's resources.

(cont. from page 11)

resulted was a four-page guide addressing the various problems we'd encountered. We wanted to suggest a variety of ways a WA could be used in a W-course; we were interested in accommodating a variety of teaching styles and uses of writing. We also needed to point out ways a WA should not be used, and to explain the WAs' employment status and time constraints. We particularly wanted to avoid their being perceived as hired readers (much less graders) on one hand, nor as assistant or adjunct instructors on the other—because the university carefully distinguishes writing-assistant internships from teaching internships.

I sent a copy of the guide to everyone on the faculty who might be preparing to teach a(nother) W-course the following semester. Everyone on the Writing Center staff was given a copy, and we went over it in a meeting, because any staff member might catch some of the overflow—students from W-courses who couldn't meet with the regular WA because of conflicting schedules. I encouraged the WAs to refer to the guide when meeting with the W-course professors (to make sure, subtly, that the professors had read them), or at any time during the semester when a professor might need to be reminded what was proper use of the WA and what was not, or what options were open for the use of their time.

The guide is still experimental, but so far it seems to have stimulated more interest among the instructors in using WAs, and they seem to have started out with clearer ideas about how the WAs might fit into their course plans. After the second semester, we made further revisions. In particular, we decided to limit the time a WA would spend on a W-course to five hours a week. Those who had to devote most of their time to W-courses felt isolated from the daily flow of life in the Writing Center, even though they were physically present in the center most of the time.

Our program differs in important ways from the one described by Geoff Gajewski at Lawrence University ("The Tutor/Faculty Partnership: It's Required," *Writing Lab Newsletter* 15.10 [June 1991]: 13-16). I believe the differences reflect the differences in size and curriculum between the two schools. Also, since our WAC is in its infancy as a formal

program (though informally much has been going on for several years), we are trying to leave several options open for the use of WAs in W-courses until we have a better idea of what works best for us.

Richard Leahy  
Boise State University  
Boise, Idaho

### Announcement of a New Journal and Call for Papers

*The Journal of Second Language Writing*, edited by Ilona Leki (University of Tennessee) and Tony Silva (Purdue University), is now accepting submissions on topics related to the study and teaching of writing in a second language. The editors encourage theoretically grounded reports of research and discussions of central issues in second and foreign language writing and writing instruction at all levels of proficiency. Send submissions or further inquiries to: Ilona Leki, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Dept. of English, U. of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-0430 (615-974-7080 or 5401).

Yearly subscription rates for this journal, published tri-annually, are \$32.50 for individuals and \$75 for institutions. (An additional charge of \$15 will be made for subscriptions outside the U.S. and Canada.) For subscriptions, contact Ablex Publishing Corporation, 355 Chestnut Street, Norwood, NJ 07648.

## The American Heritage Electronic Dictionary for the Computer

If you are looking for a dictionary for your DOS or Macintosh computer and want a software package with some interesting features, consider *The American Heritage Electronic Dictionary (AHED)*. As a dictionary, it gives you definitions, spelling, parts of speech, inflections, proper usage, pronunciation, word origins, sample sentences, hyphenation, and idioms.

But it's more than just a dictionary for definitions, a thesaurus, and a spell checker, though the spell checker is particularly powerful in being able to offer correct spellings for words missing first letters and words with reversed letters (e.g. *frist* for *first*). AHED also has a feature called WordHunter that helps you find the word you want if you can give the program a few helpful hints—and if, when giving those hints, you choose the words it has in its definitions (not always an easy task). For example, if your writing lab's Grammar Hotline gets a call from someone who wants to know what the word is for a sentence that reads the same forward and backward, type in "sentence" AND "forward" AND "backward." The program searches all the dictionary definitions and will find "palindrome." Have you forgotten what a postage stamp collection is called? Type in "collection" AND "stamps," and the computer will find "philately." The options to connect words are AND, OR, and NOT. Some searches will be frustrating if you type in words other than those in the dictionary definition, and you may find the search process rather slow, but this feature can be useful. You may also find some of the definitions somewhat thin or abbreviated.

There is also a Wildcard feature which finds a word when you don't know all the letters. This is definitely for crossword puzzle fanatics. Type in sl??p, and you get "sleep," "sloop," "slump," and "slurp." The Anagram feature finds words hidden in the word you type in.

For further information about this excellent resource for your writing lab, contact Writing Tools Group, One Harbor Drive, Suite 111, Sausalito, CA 94965 (800-523-3520). The suggested retail price is \$99.

## New NCTE Series of Concept Papers

The National Council of Teachers of English is introducing a new series of professional publications, designed to present innovative thinking about English language arts education informally, in a quickly produced format. The series features works longer than articles for professional journals but briefer than standard monographs. The Concept Papers can be ordered from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. (Price: \$6.95; NCTE members: \$4.95.)

The first four titles in this series include the following:

*Guidelines for Judging and Selecting Language Arts Textbooks: A Modest Proposal*, by Timothy Shanahan and Lester Knight. The authors propose guidelines for selection and include both examples which follow these guidelines as well as examples that are inconsistent. (Concept Paper #1, 1991: 49 pages. Stock No. 19700-0015.)

*Doublespeak: A Brief History, Definition, and Bibliography*, by Walker Gibson and William Lutz. The authors discuss the concept of doublespeak and explain how to analyze, identify, and categorize doublespeak. Doublespeak Award winners are listed. (Concept Paper #2, 1991: 46 pages. Stock No. 12277-0015.)

*Alternatives in Understanding and Educating Attention-Deficit Students: A Systems-Based Whole Language Perspective*, by Constance Weaver. Causes, assessments, and treatments for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are discussed, including the benefits of the whole language approach to teaching these students. (Concept Paper #3, 1991: 48 pages. Stock No. 01291-0015.)

*A Goodly Fellowship of Writers and Readers*, by Richard Lloyd-Jones. A discussion of the importance of helping students develop understandings about writing as a central human activity with significance beyond schooling. (Concept Paper #4, 1991: 46 pages. Stock No. 18585-0015.)

### **National Basic Writing Conference**

**October 8-10, 1992  
University of Maryland  
at College Park**

*"Critical Issues in Basic Writing: 1992"*

**Keynote speaker: David Bartholomae**

The Conference on Basic Writing is a special interest group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and provides a forum and network for those whose teaching and research focuses on basic writing students. For further information, contact Carolyn Kirkpatrick, Department of English, York College/CUNY, Jamaica, NY 11451. FAX: 718-2262-2027; phone: 718-262-2470.

### **14th National Conference of College Learning Assistance Centers**

**June 11-13, 1992  
Fordham University-Lincoln  
Center Campus**

*"Making the Learning Center a  
Campus Center"*

Contact Elaine Caputo, School of General Studies, Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458 (212-579-2507).

### **Announcement and Call for Papers**

#### **8th Annual Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association Conference**

**October 3, 1992  
Malibu, CA**

Deadline for abstracts (250-300 words) is June 1, 1992, and they should be sent to Cindy Novak, Humanities Division, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA 90263.

### **Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)**

- Oct. 2-3: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Paul, MN  
Contact: Dave Healy, General College, 240 Appleby Hall, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455
- Oct. 3: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in Malibu, CA  
Contact: Cindy Novak, Humanities Division, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA 90263.
- Oct. 15-17: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Ogden, Utah  
Contact: M. Clare Sweeney, 2625 College Avenue South #5, Tempe, AZ 85282-2344

## Computer-Integrated Tutoring

The introduction of computers into the Brookdale Community College Writing Lab did not mean that human tutors were replaced by electronic ones. Instead, we use the computers as tools to help us tutor basic writers more effectively. With the help of a simple word processing program (PFS: Professional Write) we are able to devise strategies and exercises customized to each student's paper at any point in the writing process. Each student in Brookdale's basic writing course is required to meet with a learning assistant (tutor) in the lab each week. Our approach is to first work on the higher order problems that initially affect student writers—organization, development, focus—then later move to lower order concerns such as sentence errors, punctuation, and spelling. Since we work primarily with the student paper in its process through several stages from rough to final draft, we rely as little as possible on workbooks or exercise sheets. In keeping with that approach, we decided not to turn the computer writing lab over to English skills software programs. By combining sound tutoring techniques with the computer and word processing package, it is possible for students to benefit from working on multiple revisions and skills simultaneously.

With the introduction of computers in both the classroom and lab, a significant benefit is the immediate transfer from the skills discussed to their application in the student's paper. After discussing with a tutor what problem areas the student should address, both tutor and student can move right to the computer and begin working on them. The ease and speed of the computer makes revising a paper a much less boring and intimidating task. Therefore, students often have fewer objections to reworking a paper while concentrating on perhaps a single skill area, then returning to the same paper to concentrate on another.

### Computer techniques

•**Sentence spreads - (for sentence variety, sentence structure errors, clarity, development)**

The entire essay (or a portion of it) is separated sentence by sentence and double spaced in between the lines. The writer

now sees each sentence in isolation and becomes more aware of repetitious beginnings, run-ons, and awkward sentences. The blank line under each sentence leaves room for the writer to add supporting details if needed.

•**Blank Space - (for development)**

Similar to sentence spread, this technique creates a large blank area under a general statement for the student to fill in with details. At the end of a general statement, insert several blank lines to create space within the text.

•**Brainstorm List to Sentences - (for paragraph development)**

A student who has trouble developing paragraphs writes the topic of the paragraph and then brainstorms a list of details under it. Each detail can then be converted into a sentence.

•**Tutor Typing - (for development, organization, clarity)**

As the student speaks, the tutor types her words into the computer, creating a text which may later be revised. If the student leaves out details or transitions, the tutor may prompt with questions and type replies onto the screen.

•**Underlining - (to identify main idea and topic sentences, eliminate repetition)**

In each paragraph, students underline the main idea. This allows them to see if the remaining sentences support the topic sentence or main idea. Having students locate and underline any repetitious word or phrase makes them more aware of their writing patterns.

•**Boldfacing - (same as above - highlights words or ideas for the student)**

•**Cut and Paste - (for organization, paragraph coherence, sentence variety)**

The student highlights and moves portions of text or inappropriately placed sentences to improve organization and flow. With the technique, the student can rearrange paragraphs, delete paragraphs, begin the paper with the concluding paragraph or

even change the order of sentences within a single paragraph. Individual sentences can also be respliced to create variety.

•**Word by Word Proofing - (for general proofreading)**

The tutor controls the movement of the cursor, moving it slowly from word to word as the student reads the highlighted word. As she reads, the student becomes aware of missing words, places to insert correct punctuation and misspellings.

•**Tutor Editing - (for general proofreading)**

The tutor edits a printed version of the student's paper for punctuation, grammar, and mechanics. The student takes this copy and the original, comparing the two for the differences and looking for any patterns (incorrect use of quotation marks, commas, verb tense etc.).

### Tutoring with computer techniques

On his first visit to the Writing Lab, David brought a draft of a paper he'd written in his basic skills English class. His assignment was to work with a tutor before revising it, so we began our session having him read his paper aloud and discussing high order areas that needed improvement, such as focus and development. Then he called up onto the computer screen the first draft of his paper.

To help David revise his focus, we had him use underlining. However, when he tried to underline his main idea, he had difficulty identifying it. While he could find sentences that described his topic in general terms, he could not find a sentence that described it specifically:

*There is a girl that lives in my old neighborhood that is very strange. She does things that most people do not do. At least from the people that I've been around. I cannot mention any names in this. The reason for that will be obvious later on in the story. Here are some of the queer things I witnessed spending one day with her.*

Once David saw the need for a clearer focus, we asked him what specific idea he was trying to convey about his topic. Following our conversation, David revised his introduction on the computer:

*There is a very abnormal girl that lives in my neighborhood. Michele is an attractive girl, but she is definitely lacking something. She is missing proper politeness. I personally think that she was never taught right manners from wrong manners. People's view of her is that she is very contemptuous. I'm going to take you back in time to a bizarre day with a very strange girl.*

As his focus became clearer, David began to reread his entire text, underlining the topic sentences in each paragraph to see if they helped support his main idea. He noticed an unnecessary paragraph this way, and we showed him how to use part of the cut and paste technique to delete it. The next step was to improve his development. Like many basic writers, David told his story rather than showed it through use of details:

*The first place we stopped was the pizzeria. I bought her some pizza. She didn't even ask. I was astonished. We walked to the cashier. She said to the man, "Can I use your phone." He said sure. Then she proceeded to use the phone numerous amounts of times. I was so embarrassed. I was never gonna go there again.*

To help David correct this, we created blank space underneath one of the examples in his paper, suggesting he fill it with dialogue and a description of the action:

*The first place that we stopped was the pizzeria. I bought her some pizza. I was astonished that she didn't even ask.*

*After she finished devouring almost the whole pie we went to pay. The man said, "Ten fifty please." I paid the man. Michele said to the man at the register, "Could I use your phone?" She used the phone then hung up. When I started walking out the door she wasn't pursuing. I looked back and she was dialing again and talking and hanging up. She proceeded to go through this phone cycle for about ten minutes. The man at the register said, "Is she with you?" I said, "no."*

*Then I walked outside waiting for her. Finally she came and we jumped into the car. She put up her feet on the dash. That totally agitates me. After that little episode we were off to the mall.*

When he finished expanding his example, David saved this new version of his paper under another filename (in this case 2person). Later in the week, he returned to the Writing Lab on his own, using the computer to develop other examples within his paper and getting feedback from us as he worked. While he was there, he scheduled another session with a tutor for proofreading his final version.

The paper David brought for proofreading was a marked improvement over his first draft. For example, although he had deleted unnecessary paragraphs, the entire paper was longer. In the course of revision, he had also created more complex sentences and made attempts to use more interesting and descriptive language. A major problem that remained, however, was sentence structure errors. During this appointment, we used sentence spread to help David identify run-ons and sentence fragments:

*She said, "What's up?"*

*In that piercing tone of voice that makes you want to scream.*

*She said, "Do you want to go out to lunch and to the mall today?"*

*As she sipped a glass of Pepsi that she obviously helped herself to on the way up to my room.*

*I didn't really want to go but I had nothing else to do so I said, "I guess so."*

After making these corrections, David read aloud his hard copy, making further corrections in punctuation and spelling and then changing them on the computer. As he did with each version of paper, he saved this copy under a new file name. His last step was to print out a hard copy to bring to class.

This student is typical of most of the students who are taking advantage of the tutors and computers that are available to them. Instead of being put in front of a computer screen to simply do exercises or enter text, they are improving their papers and improving their skills at the same time.

Kathy Vasile and Nick Ghizzone  
Brookdale Community College  
Lincroft, NJ

## The "Cutting" Edge: Working in the Writing Center

In the writing center, I hear some unusual comments from students about their assignments, their instructors, and their own writing abilities. One surprising remark a student made recently was that her teacher "ripped me apart." I couldn't help but sit up and listen, imagining a student's body torn limb from limb. In this instance, the reality was far less violent. The student had simply equated herself with her paper, substituting "me" for "it" when referring to the paper.

This was no accident. When you work in the writing center as a faculty tutor, you quickly realize how personally students take their work, how much they identify with their compositions.

An outsider might interject at this point that this is a common practice, especially in a first term composition class where personal essays are written. However, in this particular case, the student was not a first-term student but was enrolled in a literature survey class and was speaking of a paper which concerned not herself but the play *Othello*. How comparable were the two: a 19-year-old student and a 300-year-old play?

My point is that one strength of working in the writing center as a faculty tutor is being able to see students personally with their guard down. They are not one of 25 to 30 student faces hiding behind the mask of a class. Frequently the apathy, or what appears to be apathy, in class stems from students' reluctance to speak out, to tell their instructor how they really feel. But in the writing center where a student works one-to-one with a faculty member, that fear is gone, the shield of anonymity removed so that the student's honest feelings can come forth. Thus the faculty member can truly assess and focus on how students feel about themselves and their writing abilities.

As much as faculty are called upon to correct grammar and sentence structure, the faculty tutor is more often left with the sensitive job of repairing and rebuilding damaged self-esteem and confidence. Helping students think more positively about their abilities and about the possibility of improving them is one

of the most important parts of the writing center faculty's job. Faculty must first help students separate themselves from their essay—seeing that the result of their work is different from how they think about themselves. The faculty member must also suggest that the instructor's comments on the paper are there to guide students to clearer expression, not to denigrate or demean their efforts and certainly not themselves. In this way, students begin to understand that the instructor is neither a god judging them nor an enemy meting out punishment (i.e., "ripped me apart").

Though exaggerated, these expressions should be listened to because they reveal metaphorically what students think is happening to them. It is an unpleasant business, for sure, if your instructor wields a knife (or machete) rather than a red pen! The verb "ripped" and other active verbs like "cut," "slice," and "slash," among others, carry powerful connotations. So, too, the implication that professors delight in their butchery is frequently heard. No wonder students hate to write. How many of us would want to if we were "cut to pieces" or "sliced to shreds"?

Once in the writing center, the faculty tutor has the opportunity to discuss these comments to distinguish between the student and his or her essay, to clarify the instructor's comments. Once the student begins to see that the writing process is one that requires revision and rewriting, and that an instructor uses comments as a guide to that end, perhaps the student will then feel less violated and less vulnerable.

The writing center offers the opportunity for an interactive session in which faculty and student work together to focus on how to improve communication skills. In this way, the writing center becomes not only a resource for writing improvement but for self-improvement as well. When students leave the center, it should be with a higher opinion of themselves as well as a clearer understanding of what their instructors expect. And the next time the essay is returned covered in red, hopefully students will not mistake it for their own blood!

Maryanne Garbowsky  
County College of Morris  
Randolph, NJ

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**WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**  
*Muriel Harris, editor*  
*Department of English*  
*Purdue University*  
*1356 Heavilon Hall*  
*West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356*

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