THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Just as recursiveness is a characteristic of writing, it is also a feature of our professional conversation. We revisit topics already discussed and look at them again, adding new perceptions and revising, but keeping what was valuable and building on it. Thus several articles in this month's newsletter spiral back to the issue of focusing on grammar in tutorials. But other conversations in this issue take us in new directions—a writing lab in Denmark that encourages writing groups instead of individual conferences and yet another center in Wyoming where many of the writers bring non-classroom writing tasks.

But as a recognition that tutors are our greatest asset, the lead article reports on a survey of tutors' salaries. This valuable study provides a perspective on your tutors' pay, but I hope it also helps to strengthen your argument for pay raises next year.

And finally, a practical note on page 13 about your subscription. We don't want to lose touch with you, so before you close up shop for the summer, check the expiration date on your mailing label and remember to resubscribe if necessary.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

Dollars and sense: Compensating writing center tutors across the United States

Every six months or so, someone connected with a writing center sends an urgent message to WCenter, the electronic discussion group for writing center specialists, requesting information on how other writing centers compensate their tutors. Often prompted by an imminent meeting with a dean, department chair, or other administrator, they usually seek to arm themselves with information to argue for additional funding.

Not long ago, we each found ourselves in this position. One of us was dealing with a dean and a proposal to create a new center; the other with an English department chair and a wish to pay tutors more than minimum wage. In each case the information we gleaned proved enormously helpful. Since we were not the only ones seeking such information, we decided to survey some writing centers randomly to learn more about their staffing, tutor compensation, and sources of revenue.

During the late spring and summer of 1995, we mailed questionnaires to writ-

ing centers across the country. We received 134 responses from four year colleges and universities, 32 from two year colleges, 4 from high schools, and 5 from centers that do not fall into these three categories. What follows is what we learned.

A. Four year colleges and universities

Who works in writing centers at four year colleges and universities?

Staff profiles vary widely. Twenty-five percent reported hiring only undergraduates as tutors, and 20% employ a combination of undergraduate and graduate students. While 6% hire graduate students only, a very few centers (3%) hire only professional tutors, and one center uses only faculty. Most centers (47%) employ various combinations of undergraduates, graduates, professionals, and faculty members.

How do centers compensate their undergraduate student tutors?

Most centers (88%) pay undergraduate tutors an hourly wage, and 24% of those pay tutors with work-study funds. Some centers (13%) employ undergraduate tutors who are eligible for work-study funds, as well as some who are not. Five percent of respondents compensate tutors with course credit. A few centers (2%) use only volunteer undergraduate tutors, and the same number offer both course credit and an hourly wage to undergraduate tutors. Endowments, scholarships, and apprenticeships are other means of compensation. Almost half of the centers surveyed (42%) provide periodic raises for tutors.

What are hourly wages for undergraduate tutors?

Hourly wages for undergraduate tutors paid by 20% of respondents are $4.25, minimum wage. About half (51%) surveyed reported paying undergraduate tutors $4.51 to $5.50, with 21% paying $4.76 to $5.00 an hour. The highest wages (reported by 11% of respondents) were $6.26 or more per hour.

How are graduate students compensated for tutoring?

Most writing centers pay graduate students an hourly wage (52%) or stipend (33%). Six percent of those who pay an hourly wage use work-study funds. Other means of compensation (each 5% or less) include course credit, tuition waivers, stipends and tuition waivers, or some combination of these methods. In 2% of the centers, graduate students work as volunteers.

How are professional tutors compensated?

Half the centers employing professional tutors report paying an hourly wage, while 36% offer salaries. Eight percent offer a stipend, and a few (3%) report payment to professionals by grant or a combination of hourly wages and stipends (3%).

What are hourly wages for graduate student tutors, professional tutors, and faculty members?

Hourly wages range from $4.25 to $33.00. Twenty-five percent pay $4.25 to $5.50, 9% pay $5.50 to $6.50, 15% pay $6.51 to $9.00, 13% pay $9.01 to $12.00, 24% pay $12.01 to $15.00, and 10% pay $18.00 to $20.00. Only one respondent reported wages of $33.00.

How do writing center wages compare to other student wages for work on campus?

Sixty percent report that tutor wages are the same or comparable to other student wages on campus. Twenty-eight percent report tutor wages as higher than other student wages, while 12% report them as lower.

What are the sources of writing center funding?

Direct campus funding is the source for most (48%) centers surveyed. English departments or writing programs fund 18%, and academic deans, vice presidents, or provosts fund 11%. Only 4% are funded solely by work-study or other federal or state money. Student support services fund 5%, and 2% are supported by student fees. Twelve percent report funding from combinations of these sources.

B. Two-year colleges

Who tutors in centers at two-year colleges?

Most writing center tutors in two-year colleges are undergraduates. In fact, 30% of respondents use only undergraduates. Another 24% hire a combination of undergraduates and professional tutors, while 10% use only professional tutors.

The rest employ various combinations of undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, professional tutors and others, including retired professionals or volunteers. In those centers that pay tutors, almost half (47%) report giving tutors periodic raises in their wages.

How are undergraduate tutors compensated?

Most undergraduates (88%) work for an hourly wage; 21% are paid with work-study money. Centers that do not pay an hourly wage compensate undergraduates through work scholarships, course credit, or some combination of these payment methods. Most paid undergraduate tutors (76%) receive between $4.25 and $5.50/hr. Twelve percent earn $5.51 to $6.70/hr, and 8% receive $7.54 per hour. A fortunate few (4%) top the pay scale at $8.50/hr.

How are graduate student and professional tutors compensated?

Most who tutor in two-year college writing centers (74%) receive an hourly wage. Eighteen percent volunteer their time, while a few (4%) receive course credit or a salary for their work.

How are faculty members compensated?

Most faculty members are either paid an hourly wage or salary (53%), or are granted release time from classroom teaching (33%). A small number (7%) volunteer their time, and another 7% both receive release time and give volunteer hours.

What are hourly wages for graduate students, faculty, and professional tutors?

Hourly wages for graduate, faculty, and professional tutors vary widely, with 56% making between $5.65 and $8.75/hr. Twenty percent earn $9.00 to $11/hr., while 16% make $12.00 to $15.00/ hr. Eight percent top the hourly wage scale at $18.00 to $20.00/hr.

How do tutor wages compare to other student campus wages?

On most campuses (97%), tutor wages are the same or comparable to other student campus wages. Three percent reported higher wages for tutors. No centers reported lower tutor wages.

How are centers at two-year colleges funded?

Funding for writing centers comes from a number of different sources. Thirty-six percent are funded directly as autonomous entities. Fourteen percent are funded by English departments, and the same number are funded by grants. Nine percent use a combination of grant moneys and direct campus funding. Twelve percent operate on federal or state funds. Small numbers report funding from student fees, continuing education departments, Colleges of Arts and Sciences, private foundations, and combinations of local, state, and grant funds.

C. High school writing centers

Who works in high school writing centers?

Two of the centers responding to the survey hire high school juniors and seniors as tutors. One center hires college undergraduates, and the other combines high school juniors and seniors, college undergraduates, and school faculty members.

How are tutors compensated?

Faculty members receive a course load reduction. College undergraduates get community service credit or college course credit. High school students receive community service credit, or an academic letter, and "good snacks."

How are high school writing centers funded?

Three of the centers reported receiving school funding. One operates on a combination of school funding and an endowment.

D. Other writing centers

The five respondents in this category included three centers that serve undergraduate students in their last two years and graduate students, one center serving graduate students only, and one center that serves undergraduates in both two-year and four-year programs. All reported different staff profiles: one hires undergraduate tutors only; another hires graduate students only; one hires a combination of undergraduates and professional tutors; and another uses undergraduates, professionals, and faculty members.

Compensation for tutors in these centers varies: one compensates undergraduates with community service credit; three pay undergraduate tutors $5.00 to $10.00 an hour; one pays graduate student tutors $5.00 an hour, while another pays them between $12.00 and $15.00 an hour. Professional tutors receive $8.00 an hour at one center and $12.00 at another. Three of these centers provide periodic raises and two do not.

Three centers report that tutor wages are higher than other campus wages, while another center's wages are the same as other campus wages. Funding for these centers comes from direct campus funding, state operating budgets, or a combination of student fees and campus funding.

E. Conclusions

As we gathered our information and compiled it, we found ourselves sometimes dismayed that writing center tutors don't earn more money. We know how important and valuable their work is! Increasingly, however, we also found our discussions focusing on the intangible compensations tutors gain—the satisfaction that comes from helping others; the growth of self confidence; the lessons they learn about writing and teaching as they work with other students; the improvement in their own writing; opportunities to attend and present at professional conferences, as well as to publish in a professional journal or newsletter; the "home" on campus that a writing

A writing lab in Copenhagen, Denmark

For three years the School of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen has had a writing lab. In this essay we try to outline its background and history, and to point out not only what we have learned from related activities in the United States, but also ways in which we differ.

There would not be a writing lab in Copenhagen if it were not for our knowledge of our American counterparts. Before we opened, one of the authors of this article (Christian Kock) had visited several labs in the United States. Notable among these was that at Purdue University, directed by Muriel Harris—a unit whose extensive and active role in students' academic life was immediately impressive. A different and equally interesting model, with the lab being more like a powerhouse for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum activities, was the lab at Indiana University, Bloomington, established by Barry M. Kroll and directed by Ray Smith. A year as a Visiting Professor, teaching English and Expository Writing at the Bloomington campus, also added many insights.

The other author (Lotte Rienecker), a psychologist, began with an interest in the psychological aspects of writer's block and, inspired primarily by the writings of Peter Elbow and psychologist Robert Boice, established herself as an independent writing consultant, in increasing demand by all the universities in the Copenhagen region. Foremost among Lotte's concerns has been the development of a model for peer response groups for graduate students, as well as the usefulness of problem statements in the academic writing process.

In 1992, we succeeded in persuading the dean of Humanities that a writing lab might promote a humanistic subject—writing—of equal interest to all academic fields, and help solve a few economic problems at the same time.

The direct economic incentive for starting our lab is a long-standing problem, especially in the Humanities: the "thesis swamp," in which too many students are sucked down for far too long. Writing a master's thesis is scheduled to take six months; in average it takes eighteen months, but many students spend several years, others never graduate. This is costly for the university: Danish universities are state-owned, and their funding is a function of the annual "production" of masters' degrees (regardless of quality, one might add).

As a result, we were installed with the main object of helping thesis-writers write. While not wanting to compromise on quality, our administrators are acutely aware that more students ought to graduate, and many ought to do it faster. Our view all along has been that both things are possible, and that improved quality is certainly an issue as well.

All beginnings are small. Until now, the lab has been staffed by the two of us working half-time, with a secretary-cum-librarian to help, also on a part-time basis. From time to time, we have had graduate students of rhetoric doing trainee service. That has been all. But from the start, there has been lively interest in what the lab was doing, reflecting a general sentiment that something should be done now about writing in higher education.

So far, our small unit is the only writing lab in a Danish university, but more are on the way in Denmark and Norway. A delegation from Russia has visited, wishing to copy our format. Other institutions in Denmark, as well as the government agency responsible for secondary education, have consulted us on how to improve writing instruction and the quality of students' written work.

Higher education is organized differently in Denmark than in the U. S. Students pick their subject, such as medicine, law, English, psychology, at entry; we offer students no opportunity to shop around and home in on a major. There are no general courses: to our regret, the idea of having obligatory writing courses during the freshman and sophomore years is as alien to academics here as it is in universities all across Europe. Indeed, our institutions have until now been minimally concerned with initiating students in the academe or ascertaining that they acquire the skills they need to thrive there. In principle, Danish universities are institutions that do research, set exams, and confer degrees.

This is particularly true in the Humanities, where faculty often feel little responsibility for supervising thesis projects. As these are supposed to be tests of students' capacity for independent work, some faculty feel that they should precisely not offer significant help. Although some professors supervise with energy and commitment, their self-interest dictates that they give it low priority, and the supervision students do get often appears to be mainly a marking of errors, or to be guided by counter-productive principles like "We can talk when you have a complete outline."

On the whole, teaching has lower priority in our system than in the U. S. In Danish universities, students do not "take courses," only exams. They are rarely required to attend courses if they

can scrape through exams on their own, and they are never graded for their performance in class, if any. Writing assigned as part of courses is for practice only. The types of writing that really matter for students, and for which they come to us for help, are those which have "exam" status—either sit-down tests or at-home projects such as twenty-page term papers, and—in particular—master's theses.

Our typical clientele, then, are graduate students who have usually had no instruction or guidance in writing since high school; such concepts as genres of academic writing, writing strategies and processes, or constructive feedback, have never crossed their horizon. On the other hand, they are generally older and more advanced academically than the average student who walks into an American college writing lab for help with a term paper. Our task, seen on this background, is clearly huge; we are a drop in the ocean.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, our lab has been an instant success as far as student response is concerned. That something is now being done about the acute needs of so many students has made them flock to our activities. Fortunately, most of what we have tried has also been successful with regard to continued involvement and measured satisfaction. In the past academic year one- third of all thesis writers in the Humanities were enrolled in our twelve-hour thesis writing workshops. Many more come to bi-weekly walk-in seminars (basically three-hour lectures with some exercises and discussion) on aspects of the writing process and features of academic writing; these generally draw about 100 students (evening courses often 200). Our most popular event to this date has been a guest lecture by Donald Murray, with 300 students and *some* faculty swamping the auditorium. While his work has been an inspiration to us for a long time, we had no idea he was so well known in Denmark, nor had he.

These open seminars seem to us to be a very important way of reaching students and lecturers and making writing, and the lab, visible. Here we feature such themes as "How to Start Writing an Academic Paper," "What is a Good Academic Paper," "Revision Strategies," "What is a Good Problem Statement in the Humanities—with Lots of Examples," "Argumentative Expository Writing," and many more. We do not pretend to be able to teach such complicated skills in just three hours. The main aim is to create an awareness of academic writing as a craft and of the criteria underlying judgments about quality in academic writing.

Another aim is to get students to sign up for and form leaderless writing groups. We strongly believe that the way writing is *really* learned is to go through continuous dialogue and feedback on work-in-progress from teachers and peers. Teachers' feedback generally reflects superior expertise in the subject, but they often do not have the time needed, and their idea of what constitutes helpful response may be rudimentary, as is most people's who have never before given this notion any thought.

Our writing groups for thesis writers are based on an adaptation of the model described by Peter Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*. The groups are cross-departmental in order to gather a sufficient number of students in a short time—quite a number of the departments in the Humanities, such as the "exotic languages," have only a handful of students enrolled. We recommend six students to a group. The main activity is constructive, idea-generating feedback on unfinished bits of writing for the thesis. The idea is that the writing groups continue until all participants have graduated, and a number of groups have been successful so far. (Some flop, too.) The lab's role in the setting up of groups is to bring the participants together and to supply instruction—written and personal—on how to start up the group and keep it

running, on rational writing processes, on how to give and take useful feedback, and on general criteria for academic papers. We are prepared to spend hours with the groups to make them work for the participants, but on the whole we do not believe long-term participation by the lab staff is a good thing since the goal is to make the group self-reliant. Writing groups for graduate students have become a popular supplement to the individual tutoring students get from their thesis supervisors. By now two other schools in the University, Law and Social Studies, as well as a number of other institutions, want to consult with us on how to organize writing groups as a permanent option for thesis writers.

Readers of this journal may feel that all this sounds pretty different from what most writing labs in the U. S. are doing. Where are all the individual conferences? We do have some, but the main reason is that we wish to gain experience and develop improved methods of conferencing. Pioneers such as Harris, Murray, and others have clearly laid the groundwork for us, but we want to develop our own practice-tested principles for the different clientele and context.

One line of experiment has been tape-recorded conferences. In these we try to get the student to talk and answer queries as freely and fully as possible, after which she will take the tape home and search it for useful ideas on both substance, structure, and formulation—primarily drawn from her own part of the dialogue.

Again, the work we have done on conferencing, as our experiments with writing groups, has as its main aim to develop experience and principles for use by students themselves and the departments to which they belong.

A related initiative has been to develop two computer-assisted composition (CAC) programs. So far, we have not had the resources necessary to do follow-up studies, but hundreds of students

(mainly thesis writers) have used take-home copies of these programs.

A feature that separates our CAC software from nearly anything else we have seen is that both programs are add-ons to an existing word processor (in our case, *WordPerfect* 5.1, which remains the most common). Whether one likes it or not, most students in the Humanities (faculty too) who use PCs at all will be reluctant to use other programs than their word processor; and that, for most, it is a sophisticated typewriter that makes nice prints. Therefore we believe that CAC software which is meant actually to help such writers write better papers must be an integral part of the word processor. The many interesting CAC programs which either require writers to import/export files or feature small-scale esoteric word processors of their own are, we believe, unlikely to be used by those who need them most. Technically, both our programs consist of macros written within WP 5.1. This means that at any time during the writing one can activate the add-on aids and receive help to write copy that is integral to the document one is already writing.

Scribo (written by Lotte Rienecker) is subtitled "The Problem Statement Program." Based on extensive prior experience with conferencing, it is designed to set students going on their thesis projects. It contains about eighty questions and prompts, structured in four categories: "topic and focus," "problem statement," "checking the problem statement," and "structure." Under "problem statement," for example, one may choose to be given prompts under subheadings such as "hypothesis," "purpose," "audience," and others. The psychological advantage is that the prompts, which appear one by one at a keystroke, will often trigger written responses from students which subsequently turn out to be useful in the draft. This way, reluctant writers are "tricked" into writing bits of draft at an early stage. They may even be tricked into writing a draft introduction without knowing it: by choosing the "introduction" function, they are given their

own responses, if any, to those prompts which often supply the topics for introductory passages.

The ToolBox (written by Christian Kock) offers a handful of aids to be activated at any time during writing. One is a menu of a dozen templates for various conventional forms, ranging from the classical pattern recommended in the *Ad Herennium*, over the typical research report to the journalist's inverted pyramid. Each pattern consists of onscreen boxes, explaining the content and function of each typical part, allowing the writer to type in copy underneath. Another function, inspired by one of Bereiter and Scardamalia's experiments, offers a menu of transitional phrases to the next sentence; a keystroke places it in at the cursor-point in one's document. A third function facilitates overviewing and restructuring the draft by reducing it to headlines with bars indicating the relative length of each section. There are on-screen help boxes for problems ranging from writer's block to punctuation, and simple style-checking functions (periods are marked in different colors according to length, and most nominalizations are spotted, to allow for on-screen editing).

A theme underlying this presentation of our activities is that we look for ways to help students help themselves. At present, individual conferences are not our lab's top priority. What work we have done in this area has been done in order to gain experience, diagnose problem types, and develop practices for productive conferencing. Our main purpose is not to help individuals on a walk-in basis. If nothing else, financing and staffing considerations forbid it. This has forced us to think along other lines.

Students, we believe, should learn to help themselves. Our walk-in seminars, CAC software, and our increasing base of literature and handouts on aspects of writing are ways in which we help students help themselves individually. Students should also learn to help each other in writing groups. Some of our most

stimulating experiences have been in this area, and it ties in with the second main theme we wish to emphasize. We do not wish to say to faculty, "Send all your inept writers to us." Rather, we would like to see faculty become increasingly responsible, and increasingly well prepared, for the task of educating students to be competent writers in their respective fields.

This, we believe, should be a constant concern in classes as well as individual conferences. To assist in such a development, we want to do what we can in several areas. We will try, in seminars, publications, etc., to raise the general level of awareness as to what constitutes good writing in academic fields. What we can do is to place this issue on the general agenda among faculty; we cannot know, let alone prescribe, what the specific criteria for excellence will be in a history paper, a thesis in philosophy, a dissertation in Oriental studies. But we can insist on explicitness of criteria, and on those criteria being formulated not just with regard to local or linguistic aspects of writing, which is what people not trained in writing pedagogy tend to do, but with a full rhetorical awareness that comprises situational context, problem statement, focus, structure, standards of argumentation, etc. We can suggest ways in which such an awareness can be integrated in teaching activities, and how it can inform supervision and conferencing practices.

One project for the future will be the development of an optimal model for teacher-led intra-departmental writing groups. With an expression from musical instruction, this could be called a "master class" model. In such a format, the teacher's discipline-specific expertise could be coupled with the full benefit of teacher *and* peer feedback, based on our experience of what constructive feedback is, and how it comes about.

All these ideas are united by the consideration that while we certainly like to help, we are even keener to *help to help*. We hope we can contribute to a change

TUTORS' COLUMN

Just another day

The door opened, and in walked a student with a particularly glassy-eyed stare. It was as if he had been kicked in the independent clause and had his modifiers misplaced. He stumbled over to the desk. Hurriedly, I put down my Abnormal Psychology book and took down the relevant information. He'd been repeatedly spliced with a comma. It didn't look good. He needed help, and I was there to take the case.

I led him to the back room—somewhere free from distractions, or so I thought. He sat down and handed me his paper. It all seemed to be in order—five pages, double spaced. It was a composition paper.

"Please! You've got to help me! I was told that you could help. Please, I'm desperate."

"Read it to me. I'll see what I can do," I said, nodding and handing him a pen.

He began to read; I listened attentively. It didn't seem all that bad. Several random punctuation marks that weren't necessary, a few confounding sentences and sentence fragments—there were a few things, but he caught most of them. I only had to point out a few places where he missed. It was going pretty well. I thought I might have been wrong about this one—it was an ordinary session.

Just then, several people dressed in navy suits and wearing mirrored sunglasses broke through the door and pointed large semi-automatic rifles at us.

"Stay where you are!" came a gruff voice.

"What do you want from us?" I demanded.

"Let me explain," boomed another, rather familiar voice as it made its way through the suits. "We want the paper," the voice continued. I tried to see the owner of the voice. He made his way to the front of the group.

"Professor Smitherson . . . . I . . . I . . . um. . ." the student stammered, obviously terrified.

"Smitherson!" I hissed, recognizing the rather portly gentleman in the gray suit to be none other than my evil former freshman comp instructor.

"The very same," he said, bowing mockingly. "We meet again."

"But why do you want this student's paper?"

"Because," Smitherson retorted.

"That's not a very good reason, and it's hardly a decent sentence fragment either," I growled.

"Ahh, so you did learn something in my class."

"Yes, but you still haven't learned, have you?"

"Let me remind you, my friend, that you are not in a position to lecture me," he said, motioning to his comrades who were just waiting to unleash their arsenal for some gratuitous violence and senseless waste of life. "You know how I feel about the writing center—tutors corrupting and influencing the student's writing

with their own. I won't have you embellishing this student's—or any student's—work above his pitifully inadequate skill level. For all I know, I could be grading another one of your papers."

"I can leave," said the student nervously. I looked at him. He was frantically trying to get his stuff together. "This is obviously a personal thing. I'll even leave my paper. Oh geez!"

"No, stay here. We can handle this," I said. It didn't ease his fear any, but at least he paused. Smitherson was smiling and staring at the paper lying on the desk. "Besides," I whispered, "I have a plan."

The student looked nervously at the people with guns, at his paper, and then at me. I could tell that he would rather die than surrender his paper to Smitherson; I know I would. He was desperate. I whispered my plan to him.

"What are you up to?" roared Smitherson. "Whatever it is, it won't help you. Just give me the paper and I'll leave you both alone . . . or I'll kill you, take the paper and leave you both alone." He grinned, "The choice is yours."

"You know our policy, Smitherson" I growled. "We don't edit papers; we tutor. Read the handout on the front desk. You'll see that our purpose here is not only to offer assistance in identifying problem areas in student papers, but to teach them how to overcome those problems in the future. In fact, if you'd. . . ." Glancing over my shoulder and then back at Smitherson, I let my voice trail off. Everything came down to this moment.

"Now!" I yelled, turning over the desk. The student grabbed a large stack of paper and threw it at Smitherson and his goons. Papers flew everywhere—thousands of papers—all typed, double spaced, with one-inch margins. It was a mess. I rushed to Smitherson and hit him over the head with a copy of the MLA handbook (or was it APA? It helps to know both in an emergency.). He stumbled forward, rubbing his head. Furiously I jumped into the middle of the suits; the student followed my lead. We both began kicking and punching our antagonists. It looked like something from the old Batman television show—you know, the one with Adam West. My student and I were beating the tar out of a bunch of hired goons. The only thing missing was the large colorful words like "BANG," "SOCK," "BAM," and my personal favorite, "ZOWIE."

Soon, all of Smitherson's henchmen were lying on the floor, either unconscious or smart enough to stay down. I collared Smitherson.

"Just where do you think you are going?" I demanded.

"I'll get you," he cursed.

"Maybe so, but not today."

I thought I saw steam escaping from under his collar. I could see the student brushing aside the extraneous papers and retrieving his own. I smiled.

"Do you have any other questions?" I asked the student.

"No," he said. "I think I'm okay. Um ... thanks."

"No problem. Feel free to come back anytime," I added, watching him make a dash for the door. I smiled as he left, then I punched Smitherson, knocking him cold. "You'll never learn, will you Smitherson?" I shook my head and walked back to the front desk.

"How'd it go?" asked my supervisor.

"Not bad. Just like any other session," I shrugged. "Oh, but I wouldn't go into the back room for a while."

"Oh ... okay," he said, looking a little puzzled.

I grinned and returned to reading my Abnormal Psychology text.

The door opened. It was a student with a particularly glassy-eyed stare. I had seen her type before. Her participles were dangling, and she looked like she had several run-ons. She spoke in the passive voice. It didn't look good. She needed help, and I was there to take the case.

Stephen Schmidt
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, TX

Dollars and sense

center can provide; and the material tutoring in a writing center provides for their resumes. Not all compensation comes in the form of dollars!

We hope that our findings prove useful to those seeking additional writing center funding, as well as to those making plans to start new centers.

Kelly Child
Loyola College in Maryland
Baltimore, MD
and
Leigh Ryan
University of Maryland
College Park, MD

A writing lab in Copenhagen

in our academic culture, where institutions that do research and set exams become institutions that are more actively committed to the task of educating. Instead of being a drop in the ocean, we like to see ourselves as yeast in the dough.

Christian Kock and Lotte Rienecker
University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark

Job Announcement

Full-time Tenure Track: Tutorial and Academic Skills Instructor, De Anza College, Cupertino, California. For application materials, please contact Employment Services, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills, CA 94022 (415) 949-6217 or cms6438@mercury.fhda.edu

The Tutorial and Skills Center offers small group instruction, individual tutoring, classroom-assigned tutorials, computer-assisted instruction and self-paced skills modules. Provide vision and leadership for alternative delivery of instruction based on student needs and learning styles. Work with colleagues to develop curriculum and instructional support programs that are tailored to a diverse student population. Coordinate with campus, faculty to promote interdisciplinary use of media and technology as well as different teaching and delivery strategies appropriate for a multi-cultural population. Provide for the organization and supervision of the Center, its programs, students, and staff. Serve on various college committees. Aid in the development and teaching of the curricula of the Center and provide for training and development of the Center staff.

Minimum qualifications:
1. Understanding of, sensitivity to, and respect for the diverse academic, socio-economic, cultural, disability and ethnic background of community college students.
2. Master's or the equivalent in any of the following disciplines: English, English-as-a-Second Language, Math, Linguistics, Special Education, or Reading.

Position is open until filled.

Educators or consultants?
Finding a balance in workplace
and professional conferences

University of Wyoming writing center conferences have become increasingly divergent. Implementation of a Writing Across the Curriculum program is partially responsible for the divergence. But equally important is our reputation for working successfully with the writing of upper-class, international, and graduate students. We are staffed by English Department faculty who are well experienced in writing, the teaching of writing, and specialized writing tasks.

Because we have become recognized for our work in divergent fields and with various kinds of writing, we have increasingly been conferencing about "non-classroom" writing tasks. Many people come to our writing center with job application materials, graduate school applications, scholarship applications, and journal articles. Their writing is usually being controlled by a prompt, a set of criteria, or established expectations. Although the writing will not be evaluated by a teacher, it will be evaluated by people who will make decisions based on the writing.

Our writing center has operated primarily on the principle that we are educators, not editors. We define education in this specific setting as first diagnosing a writer's level of ability for a specific writing task and responding to needs that will help the writer move beyond that point. We have always wished to help students become better writers, to improve their writing process and not just get a better grade on an individual piece of writing. However, the growing number of non-classroom writing confer-

ences has led writing center faculty to question our focus, our mission, our philosophy. Non-classroom writing tasks require that we look carefully at a specific document to make sure that it will be acceptable for its audience. We sometimes feel that we are being asked to be consultants more than educators. Adding complexity to the situation is the fact that many international writers who speak English as a second language come to us with non-classroom writing. During 1993-94, 42% of our conferences were with non-native speakers. Of those, 21% were with graduate students. So we have been grappling with our role in these conferences and trying to draw an ethical line between helping enough and helping too much. In reexamining specific conferences with non-classroom writing, client expectations, and our responses to them, we have concluded that education remains our primary purpose.

Writers who come with non-classroom writing bring with them expectations of how we will help. Although they may not expect us to point out a misplaced comma in an English composition, they may expect us to point one out in a resume. In addition, they often are in a hurry to get the project finished because of deadlines. They do not expect to work through the text as a piece of writing in progress, but want to have it edited/proofread as a final document. They see their part of the writing process as finished and are often reluctant to make significant changes in focus, content, or format. For example, a new faculty member, for whom English is a second language, consulted the writing center

with a grant proposal. Rather than responding to the content guidelines, he had organized and developed his grant proposal according to the evaluation criteria. He was providing information in prose that is routinely inferred from the content requested and supporting documents. Since the grant proposal was due in two days, he did not want to revise significantly. Instead, he asked that we discuss grammar in the document. Perhaps that conference failed as a proposal "education" session, but the mini-grammar lessons provided him with further insight into error patterns in his writing.

Many writers working on non-classroom writing perceive that our services come with a guarantee. Although some of our suggestions are just that, suggestions, they may believe the document is acceptable or good as it is because we are not purely directive ("move this section," "delete this title," etc.). They may revise in response to our comments without fully taking responsibility for the revision process.

Where do they get these expectations? Perhaps they come from the perception that non-classroom writing tasks are the "real thing" whereas classroom assignments are "practice." Perhaps they come partially from us, because we realize the effect of these applications and articles on the writers' lives, and we feel that we should not let them leave the writing center with glaring errors. Expectations also come from our understanding of the audiences for these documents; we know that many will accept that the writers may have gotten editing help.

Our writing center advertises that we help with all kinds of writing, including resumes, job application letters, and professional articles. In our handout, an educational mission is implied but not explicitly stated. We have chosen not to include a lot of "we don'ts" that might discourage newcomers. Instead, we begin each conference with a verbal contract. We explain that we do not proofread because our goal is to help writers become self-sufficient.

However, our literature is not the only means of advertising. The idea that we "fix" or edit writing is often communicated by professors and peers. Or, writers may have used services of writing centers that edit, and they expect the same kind of service at the University of Wyoming.

How do we in writing centers accommodate this growing need? How does conferencing with non-classroom writing fit our goals?

As we thought about appropriate responses, we realized that our approach to non-classroom writing varies with different situations. One factor that affects our response is the writing situation itself. The novice writer of a journal article sought help in our writing center. The publication for which she was writing wanted articles no longer than 20 pages but because her research was qualitative, she thought the editor would accept her 28-page article. The writing center tutor knew the audience expectations better than the writer and considered it her responsibility to educate the writer about audience expectations and to discuss revision to meet the requirements. However, when a student seems wed to a focus that doesn't quite fit a classroom assignment, we probably will work with aspects of the paper other than response to the assignment.

In other non-classroom writing conferences, we will not insist on change even though we believe we understand audience expectations better than the writer. For example, we often see letters of application that are narrative and do not

provide the information requested in the prompt. While we are not in the business of restricting creativity, we realize that the audience actually wants the information requested in the prompt. However, if we question response to the prompt and the writer explains his or her reasons for narrative, then we are reluctant to force the issue.

This and similar examples give rise to the question of how much we shape a person's self-presentation and voice by suggesting changes. For instance, if a writer comes with a job application letter written as a narrative, most readers' first response would be, "No, you must begin with 'I am writing to. . . .'" In doing so, however, are we changing the persona presented via the letter? If she is the kind of person who would write a business letter that way, shouldn't we let/encourage that? Our job is to educate writers about traditional forms and audience expectations. Is it our position to tell an individual, "You must present yourself as millions of other people do?" Most deviate from standard forms because they want to stand out. We recall a resume written by a Russian who ended by saying he was a "go gettum kind of guy." At first the tutor discouraged this deviation from the traditional resume formality but then backed off. She had worked with the writer, and that statement reflected his self-identity and how he generally presented himself. She would have diluted his voice if she persisted that he change the statement.

Another factor in our response is the writer's attitude and motivation. If the writer comes seeming to want us to define changes and explain how to make the changes, we are hesitant to direct the conference as such because we are not revising the writing as partners. However, if the writer obviously is struggling with the writing and trying different strategies, none of which is working, we will tend to suggest a strategy that probably will work.

We're reminded of a hard-working Asian student who was going over his letter of application word by word and

had restated sentences repeatedly. He began his letter with "I am honored to apply for this position." Asking him, "Is 'honored' really the word you want to use?" probably would have produced a blank stare. "Honored" seemed perfectly fine to him, but its use could have made his application stand out as odd, foreign. Are we any less educators if we explain that "honored" isn't used in this context? Are we moving toward editing if we suggest a different phrase? No, we are educators who have assessed the writer's needs, and his motivation lets us know that he most likely won't expect this kind of help in future conferences. However, the suggestion will assist his writing of this text.

Several of our writing center staff feel justified in being a consultant for students who have been taught that seeking an audience for their work is a part of the writing process. For instance, one instructor taught her scientific and technical writing students that seeking an editor when needed is part of the process of becoming a self-sufficient writer. Thus when these students come to the writing center with applications and seek editing help, they are acting on what they have been taught. In contrast, others come for editing not as part of their writing process but because they perceive their part of the process as over. Our goal is to keep them engaged in the process.

Other circumstances cause writers to see the text as finished. ESL writers may compose a letter of application using the patterns of rhetoric common in their culture. For example, a Russian writer may begin with a global statement regarding the nature of work. In such cases, we show the writers samples and suggest focus and format changes. Some writers might argue that they were accepted at the University of Wyoming or were hired for a job with such a letter, so they believe that there is no need for change. As editors, we would simply make the changes. As educators, we let writers make such choices, assuming that they will learn from the outcome.

We vary our responses because of our

mission. If writers are trying to help themselves, then we feel justified as educators to help them as consultants. But if writers are trying to get someone else to do the work, our responsibility is limited. As educators we are responsible for helping people to write; we are not responsible for their writing.

What specifically can we do to help balance our roles as educators and consultants? We need to define more clearly what is acceptable help for various situations. For classroom writing, writers often are experimenting with new ideas and strategies. They're involved in the process of learning by sometimes being unsuccessful in their writing tasks. But most people don't want to try out new ideas in a job application. The primary purpose of the writing task is not to learn to write better but to get a job. If we are to serve people, then don't we serve best by helping them learn to present themselves well? Certainly we want them to present their ideas, not ours; certainly we want them to create their own impression, not ours. But is it any service to refrain from telling a writer that even though he wants to tell the graduate school how Frisbee helped him find himself, that the graduate school wants to know how he developed an interest in his major?

We also need to feel comfortable treating different writers in different ways. After all, the strength of one-on-one conferencing is that it is individual. Writers who do not accept their part in revising need a shove so they take responsibility. Writers who are doing their part aren't intending to take advantage of writing center services if we offer specific suggestions. We conclude that when we work with non-classroom writing, we serve first as educators, but educators sometimes work as consultants. Our goal with non-classroom writing conferences is different because the purpose of the writing is different. We do not, however, wish to ever lose sight of our educational goal.

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On the value of grammatical "correctness"

I was asked recently to address the staff at the Writing Center of Oregon State University's Center for Writing and Learning on the topic of how writing assistants, who encounter primarily expository writing from across the disciplines, could most effectively assist students referred from my introductory fiction writing class.

I knew that the staff at the Center were eager to dispel the misperception that they offer a proofreading service, and I wanted to be sensitive to that as I prepared my remarks. Nevertheless, when I considered the question put to me (How would you like us to help your students?), I had to admit I was sending them for a review of the basics. I have always felt strongly that mechanical proficiency is essential to good writing, whatever its genre, and have refused to accept that this philosophy was merely the consequence of training I had received myself. To my students I would argue that you cannot develop a distinctive style if you're not in control of its primary element, nor can you effectively bend or break rules for a creative purpose unless you know what those rules entail.

Towards this end, I had been administering a diagnostic test early on in the term (three short passages of fiction in which I ask students to locate and correct errors such as I encounter most frequently in student work, e.g., *its/it's* confusion and punctuation within dialogue). All those receiving 70% or less were required to visit the Writing Center before they submitted their first full-length story. This term, however, having discovered the limitations of such testing, I have taken to keeping a record for each student of the errors which recur in the take-home assignments and in-class writing they produce during the first three weeks of class. I go over this card with my students individually during conferences, and require them to bring it, with their returned assignments and a

copy of the fiction they are working on currently, to the Writing Center, a visit which I now require of all students should these errors persist. This approach may be more time-consuming, but has proven to be more effective in identifying, explaining, and correcting error.

In the course of what became largely an ad lib presentation, I found an opportunity to finally articulate an idea that had been eluding me for some time, an idea which is at the root of my frustration with those who disparage the value of mechanical proficiency. What I came up with is this: that arguments about er-

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 4-5: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Paul, MN
Contact: Ginger Young, Central Missouri State University, Humphreys 120, 320 Goodrich Drive, Warrensburg, MO 64093

Oct. 24-26: Rocky Mountain Writing Center Association, in Albuquerque, NM
Contact: Anne Mullin, Writing Lab, Campus Box 8010, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209 (208-236-3662).

April 18-20: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Augusta, GA
Contact: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Communications, Augusta, Georgia 30904-2200. Fax: 706-737-1773; phone: 706-737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu.

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Content is as content does

In one of the classes I'm teaching this semester, we've just begun talking about theories of response. We've examined a few sample student papers with problems ranging from severe grammatical difficulties to muddled organization and development. We've talked about the role that marginal comments and terminal comments can play in revision, and how those comments can be structured to encourage revision without being too directive or judgmental. We've shared stories about questionable commenting practices and questionable writing teachers, and everyone seems to be fully engaged in the topic and has some opinion to share. But one of the issues that has provoked the most animated—no, make that heated—discussion in our class is the degree to which a teacher has the right to confront matters of content or belief in student writing.

Some of my students have taken the position that as writing teachers they have no right to criticize a student's beliefs, no matter how offensive or wrong-headed they might seem. As one person in the class put it, "My job is to teach students how to write. It is *not* my job to teach students what their values should be or to tell students what they should believe. That's the family's responsibility."

Other students have taken just the opposite position, arguing that it is, indeed, our job to critique student beliefs whenever those beliefs are expressed in writing and whenever those beliefs appear to be unsupported by evidence, ignore possible counterarguments, or are likely to provoke sharp emotional reactions in their audience. Not to address such issues, they claimed, is a kind of intellectual cowardice, tantamount to an aban-

donment of our role as teachers. As one student put it, in an online discussion, "The hottest fires of hell are reserved for those who, in times of moral crisis, retain their neutrality."

As our in-class conversation continued, we began to extend these lines of argument into more mundane and commonplace writing issues. Should writing teachers address matters of belief or content *at all* in student papers, particularly when the beliefs expressed or content included are merely conventional or somewhat naive? To what extent should writing teachers provide students with content for their essays, and is it even *possible* to comment on essay drafts without providing students with content in one form or another? Where do we draw the line between critiquing a student's writing and critiquing a student's beliefs? Can comments on the form of an essay be kept separate from comments on content, and is that something that we, as writing teachers, should be striving for?

The parallels between this line of discussion among future classroom teachers and similar discussions among writing center tutors about the ethics of intervention are, I think, fairly obvious. In writing centers, we regularly reflect upon our intervention practices, and we are most acutely aware of the need to maintain a practical and ethical balance between our desire to help students improve their writing and our desire not to be too directive or controlling in doing so. One of the most often used mantras of writing center practice (right behind "Our focus is on improving the writer, not the immediate piece of writing") is that "We help students primarily with matters of form and expression, not content." When we

try to mollify faculty concerns about the kind of help we provide to students, when we try to convince them that we are not, as some faculty believe, a kind of "institutionalized plagiarism," we whip out the old saw about how organization, focus, argumentation, and development are our bailiwick, not content. We recite aphorisms and homilies about making sure "the writer does most of the work in conferences" and how "we expect the writer to be the expert in the subject matter," and we contend that since our method is essentially Socratic, we are actually drawing information out of the student writer rather than contributing such information ourselves.

Well, in point of fact, the Athenian senate didn't think much of that argument. They put Socrates to death for corrupting the youth of Athens, not for allowing Athenian youths to discover how corrupt they were already. The members of the senate were well aware of an important rhetorical truth: Sometimes asking the right questions in just the right way can be an even stronger influence on individual thought than telling someone what you want him or her to think. Not only do the listeners begin to fall in step with the questioner's point of view, they also fall prey to the illusion that they came to such conclusions themselves and are therefore less likely to question them.

Of course we deal with matters of content in the writing center. How could we possibly avoid it? Form and content are intimately related and virtually inseparable. One of the things we have learned quite clearly from grammarians such as Wallace Chafe and Noam Chomsky as well as from speech act theorists such as J. L. Austin and John Searle is that the

way you say something affects the *meaning* of what you say. When we turn our attention to matters of style, of expression, of development, of argumentation, or even of punctuation in a student paper, we are absolutely affecting the meaning—and therefore the content—of that paper. When we ask students why they decided to claim Hester Prynne was an early feminist, we are affecting content. When we ask students whether they considered the Bill of Rights when constructing their argument about censorship, we are affecting content. When we ask students whether their point about the harmful effects of affirmative action might require additional evidence, we are affecting content. When we suggest that an audience might find the phrase "strong, controlling woman" less offensive than "bitch," we are affecting content as well.

We maintain the convenient fiction of a form/content distinction partly for practical reasons and partly because we recognize that there are different degrees of content-level help. In purely pragmatic terms, it is much easier to maintain cordial and productive relationships with faculty whose students come to the writing center when those faculty do not see what we do as a threat to their evaluation practices or their goals for individual students. I think that view came across quite clearly in the survey of faculty attitudes I reported on in last month's column. Many of the professors who had no objections to their students bringing take-home exams into the writing center based their position on the belief that the writing center limited its assistance to matters of expression and style alone. In some cases—as with students who are writing about highly technical, scientific subject matter—our contributions to the content or substance of an essay may indeed be extremely limited, and the form/content split accordingly distinct. In other cases—as with students who are writing about topics in the humanities—our contributions, both intended and inadvertent, may be a good deal more sub-

stantial and the form/content split a good deal fuzzier. Rather than engage in an extended discussion with faculty members about how difficult it is to discern exactly where the line between form-help and content-help should be drawn whenever the subject comes up, I'm generally content to let all of us live quietly in our comfortable glass houses and hope nobody decides to pick up nearby stones.

Besides, I think we can make distinctions between content-level help and *content-level help*. When a tutor suggests that a student provide additional evidence to support an argumentative point, that is quite different from having the tutor provide the evidence herself. In the first case, the tutor is responding as a reader; in the second, the tutor is responding as a co-author. This is an important distinction that most writing center tutors can recognize and embrace, and a distinction that seems inherently reasonable. Even if we admit that the help we provide in a tutorial conference will necessarily impact content in one way or another, we can nevertheless adjust our pedagogy to lessen that impact at critical moments. (In this respect, writing center tutors do not fall victim to an epistemological trap that is one of my pet peeves with critical liberatory pedagogy. Several prominent critical liberationists make the argument that since all writing and all classroom interactions are embedded in political contexts, then politics is a legitimate subject matter for writing classes. Writing center tutors, on the other hand, perceive that even though all writing conferences are immersed in content, that need not be taken as a carte blanche justification for more explicit and profound intervention in student writing. Just as not all kinds of help are the same, not all effects on content are equally substantive or directive.)

Sensitivity to our own practices is, I suspect, the most important component of our pedagogical ethics with regard to

content. Just last week, for example, one of my tutor/consultants was talking with me about a conference she had with a troublesome student, one who kept trying to wheedle "too much" information out of her about what he should do with his paper. "I just came out of the conference feeling really dissatisfied," she said. "I had the distinct impression that I'd helped him more than I should have." I thought for a moment about what she said and then told her not to worry too much about it. If she felt discomfort, then that meant that she had internalized criteria for determining what constituted an appropriate amount of help and what didn't, and she was working with a student who tested the boundaries of those criteria. Understanding where those boundaries lie and being sensitive to them can only make her a better, more reflective, and more ethical tutor in the long run. And that's more important to me than whether or not one student got more help than he should have.

Michael A. Pemberton
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WLN Subscription Alert!

Mail your renewal early to guarantee a September issue when you return to campus. If your mailing label shows 8/96 or 9/96 expiration, look for a renewal notice by mid-May. Although we've sent post-expiration "grace" copies this year, we'll resume "real-time" mailings for Volume 21. Please alert your business office before you leave campus for the summer.

Mary Jo Turley
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Southeastern Writing Center Association

Call for Proposals
April 18-20, 1997
Augusta, GA
"High Tech, High Touch"
Keynote speaker: Gail E. Hawisher

Proposals are invited for individual presentations and entire sessions. Topics could include (but not be limited to) tutor training, consulting methodologies, writing across the curriculum, technological pedagogy, selection of appropriate hardware and/or software, student assistants in the computer lab, library resources on-line, lab design and organization, record keeping and/or evaluation systems, student learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration in the writing center.

For individual presentation proposals: send two single-spaced hard copies of your 500-word summary and your name, institutional address, phone number, e-mail address, and audiovisual equipment/technology requirements. For proposals for entire sessions: send a 50-word overview of the session, plus a 500-word summary for each of the four presentations in the session; each summary should include the information requested for individual presentations. Session proposals must include two copies of each summary. Deadline: Oct. 15, 1996. Send proposals to: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature and Communications, Augusta, GA 30904-2200 Fax: 706 737-1773; tel: 706 737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals
Oct. 25-27, 1996
Oklahoma City, OK
"Exploring Complexity"
Keynote speaker: Christina Murphy

Please submit a 250-word description of your presentation, workshop, panel or roundtable. Indicate if your presentation is intended for an audience new to peer tutoring or for one that has an established program. Identify the speakers and their roles within your institution. Proposals will be included in the conference program. We strongly encourage proposals from peer tutors.

Send proposals by June 10 to Molly Wingate, NCPTW Program Chair, Colorado College Writing Center, 14 E. Cache la Poudre Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80903 E-mail: mwingate@cc.colorado.edu; phone: (719) 389-6742; fax: (719) 634-4180. Registration information: Before Oct. 1, 1996: students $35 and directors $70; after Oct. 1, 1996: students $40 and directors $75. For registration and accommodation information and forms, please contact: Kevin Davis, NCPTW Site Chair, Writing Center, East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma 74820; phone: 405-332-8000; e-mail: kdavis@mailclerk.ecok.edu

Association for the Teaching of English Grammar

Call for Papers
July 19-20, 1996
College Park, Maryland
"Grammar for the 21st Century"

Proposals are invited on any topic connected to the teaching of grammar—both research and pedagogy. The program can accommodate a variety of presentations, including workshops, single or combined presentations, panel discussions. Please submit your proposal (a 1-2 page description) by June 15th to George Oliver, ATEG Program Chair, Dept. of English, University of Maryland, 2119 Susquehanna Hall, College Park, MD 20742. Phone: 301-404-1426; e-mail: GO5@UMAIL.UMD.EDU

Grammatical correctness

ror will be most effective when they're related to an interpretation of the author's intent. Students should be taught to recognize the consequences of the errors they make, i.e., how a reader's comprehension and appreciation of their work can be jeopardized by grammatical error.

Most writers want to be taken seriously. Errors can give a reader a false impression by making the text appear hastily written, obscuring the hard work that may well have gone into its preparation. Even worse, errors can render a text so incomprehensible that the reader simply gives up in despair. A student of mine, for example, wrote a story based on her work in a women's shelter. So riddled with error was this three-page manuscript that a few of her peers confessed they'd been unable to make sense of it—and had stopped trying after the

first page. Practically all the critiques she received suggested she give more thought to her plot and characters, when in fact she had a clear and well-reasoned conception of both, as she was able to demonstrate during class discussion. At their most damaging, errors can work against the intentions of the piece, with thematic disharmony as the result. In a story about a man breaking free from an addiction, for example, or in a passage designed to incite an angry crowd, the passive voice would be inappropriate, when the movement of the piece is toward empowerment.

What is at issue, then, is not "correctness" for its own sake, an insistence upon which can be limiting and restrictive, perhaps even insensitive to those whose preferred style of self-expression does not conform to the rules of standard English. But to argue that incorrectness

obscures meaning, spoils the reader's enjoyment of the text, and (most importantly) may work against the author's intent, is much more effective, I think, and is more likely to elicit a favorable response from writers, whether student or professional. Willingham (1990) describes the value of positive reinforcement, of phrasing commentary in such a way as to invite students into the revision process. Stressing the relationship between correct usage, effect, and intent is one way to do this.

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Work cited

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ESL quandary

The "Peanuts" character Lucy is a fine learning tool for the writing tutors, and I often distribute the latest installment on the "tutoring" thread when it appears in the Sunday comics. These episodes begin with Snoopy sitting on his doghouse with his typewriter as Lucy approaches with some instant advice, e.g.: "That's a terrible way to begin a story.... It's so trite!" As Snoopy sits silently, she points her finger at him and orders: "'Once Upon a Time' .... That's the way all the good stories begin. Do that .... Begin your story with 'Once Upon a Time.'"

Bossy Lucy is a caricature of the kind of tutor I don't want mine to be. ESL writers and others who have much difficulty with sentence-level errors, however, sometimes test this caricature by wanting from us what comes easily but what we know—after some training—that we shouldn't do: go through papers

line-by-line, pointing out mistakes and making suggestions. In their quest for the perfect, error-free paper these writers are often quite happy to have us fall back into those habits that our tutor trainer tried so hard to eradicate: focusing on lower order concerns, ferreting out all the errors we can spot, and dominating the talking.

The writing center adage that we are not about perfect papers but about better writers faces the acid test when we are working with writers for whom English is a second language. What they want—an error-free paper—is something that we're not able to give them without cheating: taking over the task in a way that makes the writer a plagiarist.

How easy to give them what they want! We can enjoy using our expertise to help a writer achieve her goals. She wants a perfect paper—and we know

how to give it to her. Why should we resist giving to ESL writers what they so desperately desire?

The writing tutors in one of our academic support programs are asking this question right now. One of them played the Lucy role with a writer and, with all good intentions, ended up rewriting the paper. The instructor called to complain when she saw that the paper was drastically improved over the writer's previous efforts. The tutor's question now is, "Well, if I can't make corrections, what *can* I do about error-laden papers?"

The idea that we somehow know what's really "better" for ESL writers seems paternalistic. If given the choice between a better grade and a rather nebulous "control over one's writing," who would choose the latter? Control involves real effort. And, if we don't give the writer what she wants, she might find

someone else who will do so. Instant gratification is the perfect paper, now, the good grade, now. The delayed gratification of becoming a stronger writer takes weeks, months, even years of effort. The small beginning steps seem like very poor reward indeed.

The real answer to this quandary goes to the core of what tutoring is all about. Tutoring is valid only when it is part of the learning process. That can be its only real reason for being. Otherwise it is, indeed, the kind of cheating and coddling that its detractors accuse it of being.

As writing centers and learning centers fight for their survival in this time of budget cuts, this must be part of our message. With students both weak and strong, our tutoring interactions are not a place to get quick answers but a place to learn as we converse, question, listen to one another. Tutoring ses-

sions with well-trained tutors are as much a part of the educational process—for both tutee and tutor—as classes, professors, exams, and papers.

We don't abandon ESL writers. We can help them become, gradually and with great effort on both parts, better writers. We can help them identify their patterns of error and the reasoning, the hypotheses, behind these errors. We can guide them in compiling a notebook of their patterns of error, grouped by type, with incorrect forms and correct forms written side-by-side. We can show them how to use the notebook in the revision stage as they learn to read for the kinds of errors they make. We can demonstrate how to focus on sentence-level errors by separating sentences from their context, either by using the sentence-spread function on the computer or by marking off one sentence at a time with big index cards or half sheets of paper.

On their way to becoming better writers, ESL students will, if they work in this way, turn in imperfect papers. There is not time to deal with all writing concerns in one session. So instructors need to be educated, too—not an easy task. Student writers aren't the only ones who expect to walk out of a tutoring session with a perfect paper. Many instructors see that as our role also. The task of educating the entire campus community about how we work with writers is an arduous and constant one. Articles like this one are part of that effort.

"Cleaning up" papers for ESL writers and others is as much a violation of the "no plagiarism" pledge as the fraternity files of essays and exams. Our self respect and professionalism are at stake.

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THE WRITING LAB
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