THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Volume 24, Number 8 Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing April, 2000

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month's issue of the newsletter should provide some lively discussion at your staff meetings. Authors tackle topics that range from suggestions for explaining style to working with students who come to tutorials in emotional overload. For those writing labs and centers that include English Education majors as tutors, another essay offers us insights into how tutoring and tutor-training help to professionalize these future high school teachers. And our Tutors' Column essay emphasizes yet another way tutors grow as professionals. We often talk about how much we learn from the students with whom we work. But this month's essays should also remind us that we learn from each other as well.

If you are planning a writing center conference for next year, please contact us by May 1 if you would like an announcement in the June issue of the newsletter, the last issue of this academic year. Many of us are planning next year's budgets and schedules and would like this information to help us plan to attend these conferences.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Training writing consultants to utilize supportive behaviors

Midterm was upon us and Monica, a freshman, arrived ten minutes late for her appointment with a writing consultant. Bret, a professional writing tutor, quickly began reading aloud the rough draft she handed him, obviously trying to make up for the lost ten minutes. As I observed the conference from my office, I noticed Monica fidgeting, sighing, and watching the clock. I stepped out of my office to hear how Bret would handle this situation. Surprisingly, he didn't seem to notice her verbal cues. He proceeded through her paper, and the more suggestions he made, the more irritable Monica became. She finally blurted out, "I don't have time to make all these revisions to my paper. This paper is due tomorrow, and I still have to study for four midterm exams; on top of all that, my boss won't let me have one day off so that I can get caught up." Bret immediately referred Monica to the Development Center where she could speak to a counselor; however, Monica dismissed this idea as taking too much of her time, so she gathered her things and headed for the door. When I asked Bret if he had noticed Monica's nonverbal communication, he stated that he had,

but he wasn't sure how he could have helped her. He couldn't make all her problems go away. Besides, her paper was due the next day, and it was her fault that she had waited so long to begin working on it. Could Bret have handled this session differently? Unfortunately, he was doing what he was taught to do: focus on the assignment and make referrals for counseling if the need arises. However, an empathic response to Monica's fidgeting and sighing at the onset of the conference could have helped Monica feel less anxious and focus on her paper. At this moment, I knew I needed to find a way to teach my tutors to utilize supportive behaviors.

As I began researching this issue, I discovered that many writing center directors had grappled with this dilemma. Elizabeth A. Spaeth's "Tutoring Writing From the Psychiatrist's Couch" posed some interesting questions: "What do we do. . . when, in the act of writing, a person realizes the intensity or magnitude of a personal problem and is overwhelmed by it? Is there anything we can do as tutors to help? What kind of attention can we give to a student in distress?" (1). Spaeth suggests that some writing assignments "require self-disclosure," and "it is an important part of learning to probe beyond what is easily accessible, even to be disturbed or jarred out of one's complacency in order to be able to see. The word *educate* means to lead out" (2). She concludes by stating that unless we provide some training in "dealing with psychological repercussions" of this type of writing, it would be best to focus on other writing assignments (6). However, my tutors and I have little control over the types of assignments students receive from their instructors. We must deal with the repercussions.

These repercussions come in many forms. In addition to coping with inner wounds opened by specific writing assignments, students must also cope with numerous other life issues. Students may initially visit the writing center with every intention of working on their papers; however, once they get involved in this semi-personal relationship and have the attention of someone who genuinely cares about their success, they may have a difficult time concentrating on their assignment. They only want to unload their problems on the poor, unsuspecting, unprepared tutors. As Linda Poziwilko states, "students who arrive on our campuses are facing one of the most psychologically demanding periods of their lives, and they come bearing a huge load of psychological baggage. As anyone knows who has tutored even briefly, some of this baggage often gets unpacked in the writing center" (3). Tutors will be the first to say, "We are not counselors." Should tutors immediately send these psychologically overloaded students to a professional counselor or should tutors try to minimize the effects of the stressors (college or life) so that they can help students focus, thus, helping them learn? The answer to this question does not have to be complex. If students begin discussing issues that revolve around harming themselves or others, then yes, tutors are obligated to make a referral. However, most of the baggage is not so severe and can be quickly minimized so that tutor and student can focus on the assignment.

Muriel Harris discusses the tutor as counselor: "As counselors, we have to remember that we don't know until we ask—or spend some time in listening for—what might be derailing the student's efforts to write. . . . Only in a conference can we consider the writer as a whole person" (38). Harris defines the prewriting conferences as the time when the tutor "is a friendly listener, interested in each student as an individual, a person who may have something to say" (38). Unfortunately, listening is not always something that comes naturally. My dilemma as a writing center director was how to teach Bret and my other tutors to use an empathic response with overwhelmed students. I know that supportive behaviors during a tutoring session are as important as tutor knowledge of writing strategies, so I continued my search for training material and was struck by the lack of it in this area.

About this time, I was accepted into a Counseling Psychology Program where I was introduced to Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's Listening Model and Dr. Jack Gibb's Communication Model and was instructed to practice

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

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them. Being relatively new to that area, my only option for viable "subjects" was the writing center. So, I began practicing and journaling about my experiences. Needless to say, by utilizing the two models and applying the listening and the supportive behaviors, I became the most sought-after tutor in the writing center.

Faber and Mazlish's listening model is deceptively simply, but when practiced during training sessions, can create empathic tutors. Step 1 entails listening with full attention. In order to assist students in a state of distress, tutors must learn to withhold all comments and just let students talk. In fact, when training tutors to utilize this step, I encourage them to only listen, instructing them to bite their tongues if that's what it takes. It is quite natural to want to jump in and offer advice, ask questions, or provide a personal philosophy; however, Faber and Mazlish effectively describe how students feel when tutors interrupt by providing advice, questions, etc.

> When [students are] upset or hurting, the last thing [they] want to hear is advice, philosophy, or the other fellow's point of view. That kind of talk only makes [them] feel worse than before. Pity leaves [them] feeling pitiful; questions put [them] on the defensive; and most infuriating of all is to hear that [they have] no reason to feel what [they are] feeling. [Their] overriding reaction to most of these responses is 'Oh forget it. . . . What's the point of going on?' (8).

In addition to listening, step 1 requires that tutors learn basic attending skills—eye contact, body position, a head nod.

Step 2 of the Listening Model encourages acknowledging students' feelings with one or two words: "Oh" . . . "Mmm". zx. . "I see." Limiting comments to one or two words allows the student to continue processing the problem while knowing that the tutor is actively listening. Unlike step 2, step 3 gives tutors a chance to add to the dialogue by identifying the students' feelings. This is the most difficult step of the Model. To give students' feelings a name requires much practice. This is something that novice counselors continually struggle with. Although this step is difficult to learn, once mastered the students will begin

> to feel less upset, less confused, more able to cope with [their] feelings and [their] problems. . . . The language of empathy does not come naturally to us. It's not part of our 'mother tongue.' Most of us grew up having our feelings denied. To become fluent in this new language of acceptance, we have to learn and practice its method (8-9).

Role playing is an excellent way for tutors "to learn and practice" identifying feelings. Step 4 discusses giving students their wish in a fantasy. Many of my tutors initially scoffed at step 4 but soon discovered that this step can serve as effective closure, giving students a moment's reprieve from their problems which ultimately helps them turn their attention back to their writing assignments.

I want to relay one successful experience I had using this model. A few semesters ago, a student I had worked with on several occasions entered the center for her regular Tuesday night appointment. I immediately started reading her essay aloud, praising and suggesting as I went along. Her body language revealed that she was not listening. She kept fidgeting and sighing, and I knew I was not getting through to her. I simply stopped, pushed her paper to the middle of the table, put down the dictionary I was holding, and turned my body toward hers. She did not ask what I was doing but immediately started to unload her "baggage" for the day. She told me how she had to run all over town with her three children; one had baseball practice, one dance class, and the other a birthday party. She was meeting with me between "pick ups" and had exactly 37 minutes before she had to leave to begin the rounds. I listened, made eye contact, acknowledged her feelings with a word, gave her feeling a name (I remember using words like *agitated*, *overwhelmed*, *drained*), and finally, I granted her wish in a fantasy. I said, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a chauffeur to take your kids to all their events, and you could have all that time to devote to your studies." Suddenly, a big smile came across her face as she mentally pictured actually having a chauffeur. She relaxed, and we still had 28 minutes to work on her essay. I know I did not make all her problems go away. However, I knew she would not be able to concentrate on the paper until she did some unloading. The above scenario took less than ten minutes, and the only thing required of me was to listen and tune in to her feelings. This was a small price to pay to get the student where she needed to be.

In addition to learning effective listening skills to help minimize students' problems, tutors must learn supportive behaviors. For eight years, Gibb conducted extensive research on defensive and supportive behaviors, and from his study he concluded that we all harbor a self-image, and defensive interactions occur when someone threatens our well-protected portraits (Meyer). Not only is Gibb's research important for understanding what goes on during general, daily interactions, but also his findings can be applied to the dialogues that occur during writing consultations. Students come to the Learning Center with a predetermined view of themselves as writers; a few have inflated images of their writing and are quite protective of this image; however, the majority of students who enter the Learning Center have negative, insecure perceptions of their writing ability. This view has developed over a lifetime from comments made by family, friends, and teachers. Because the Center's goal is to educate, to facilitate, to support, and to empower, writing consultants can change these self-

defeating attitudes through education and through the use of supportive behaviors.

Evaluation versus Description

Gibb's Communication Model consists of six supportive behaviors that are juxtaposed with defensive interaction. His first supportive behavior, description, refers to the healthy, supportive interaction that occurs when tutors describe the problem as separate from the student. Its counterpart, evaluation, specifically means you-oriented language (Meyer). This language, coupled with a critical, caustic tone, intimidates students, resulting in unproductive sessions.

> ***Evaluation*****:** "Look what you did here. You made a serious error by connecting two main clauses with just a comma, making this a comma splice error." In this example, the tutor makes the student the problem by using destructive "you" language.
>
> ***Description*****:** "This sentence contains a comma splice error, a serious error, but one that can easily be revised." The sentence now becomes the problem, and the tutor educates and supports the student, protecting or, hopefully, changing his or her self-image.

Control versus Problem Orientation

Most people vehemently resist being controlled. Gibb's supportive behavior, problem orientation, attempts to inspire a person to take ownership of a problem. People who initiate solutions follow through with the problem solving process (Meyer). Tutors should let students maintain control of their essays by limiting the amount of writing they do on students' papers and by permitting them to have the freedom to develop solutions.

> ***Control*****:** "Instead of using the word *happened* in this sentence, why don't you use the word *transpired*. It just sounds better." This suggestion is much too controlling. Unless a word is used incorrectly or inappropriately, the tutor should not suggest changing it. The tutor should elicit suggestions from the student when revision is necessary.
>
> ***Problem Orientation*****:** "The word *eventuate* is somewhat awkward in this sentence. Let's look up the definition of the word and make sure it's the one you want to use. If not, what other word could you use that would better demonstrate what you are trying to say?" In this example, the word is used incorrectly and would result in faulty communication and a word choice error. The tutor relinquishes control and empowers the student by asking her to solve the problem.

Strategy versus Spontaneity

Gibb's defensive behavior, strategy, can be defined as manipulation. Again, most people do not want to be manipulated, and many recognize manipulative behavior. His supportive behavior, spontaneity, suggests that a healthy dialogue results from open, honest, and up-front communication (Meyer).

> ***Strategy*****:** "Do you really believe that animal testing is too limited? Consider the animals' feelings and the suffering these poor creatures must endure. Your instructor may not agree with you, and your grade could suffer." Obviously, the tutor is strongly against animal testing and is attempting to manipulate the student into changing his topic. The tutor would be well advised to focus more on the essay's support for the topic, its organizational pattern, and its grammatical aspects.
>
> ***Spontaneity:*** "Interesting perspective. You might consider developing more fully your point about the effects of animal experimentation on the advancement of AIDS research in paragraph two." The tutor now focuses exclusively on the essay, facilitating improvement and eliciting student involvement. The tutor's comment that the student has chosen an interesting point of view is not an admission of support for animal testing.

Neutrality versus Empathy

Gibb's defensive behavior, neutrality, can be defined as indifference (Meyer). Students may behave defensively when tutors do not give them their undivided attention. Tutors should be aware that students unconsciously evaluate tutors' use of eye contact, tone of voice, and appropriate body language. Nonverbal communication can be utilized to demonstrate empathy, which plays a key role in writing consultations. The Listening Model fits well into this specific category.

> ***Neutrality:*** "You have chosen an interesting and complex topic, *but* you failed to fully develop it." The tutor's use of *but* demonstrates an indifferent response that negates everything that comes before it. The student quickly forgets the tutor's ephemeral compliment and focuses only on the negative.
>
> ***Empathy:*** "Great topic, Jeff. This must have been difficult to develop. What more information could you add to make this paper even better?" The tutor keeps his tone positive, supports the student, and exhibits empathy.

Superiority versus Equality

Tutors tutor because they have the knowledge and experience to do so; therefore, in this sense they are superior to the student. However, tutors must avoid a patronizing, demeaning tone and must consciously create equality in the consulting relationship. Interestingly, Michael A. Pemberton states "that tutors must work hard in conference sessions to deflect the 'authority' label these students wish to pin on them and attach it securely to the students themselves" (68). Not only can taking a superior tone be demeaning and patronizing to students, but it

can also create dependency.

***Superiority*:** "So you're writing a paper against the PC movement. A good thesis statement for this paper might be something simple like, 'The politically correct movement will eventually result in a backlash,' or 'Forcing people to use politically correct terminology creates an underlying feeling of resentment and will eventually result in a backlash.'" The tutor takes over the assignment and even comes up with several possible thesis statements for the students. It is not hard to imagine why this type of tutoring session creates dependency. The student is probably hurriedly writing as the tutor speaks so as to catch every word.

***Equality*:** "So, you're writing a paper against the PC movement? Can you tell me what ideas you will use to support your position? [after student lists several reasons] OK, what kind of thesis statement could you write that reflects those ideas?" The tutor now asks appropriate questions to stimulate thought. The tutor doesn't take over, but allows the student to be an active participant in the session. A relationship based on equality is being established here.

Certainty versus Provisionalism

Many times, tutors feel quite certain as to how an essay should read and know they could present the information more effectively. However, there are myriad ways an essay can be developed or organized. According to Gibb, provisionalism is the ability to be open to other points of view (Meyer).

***Certainty*:** "I know you didn't mean to say that our judicial system always makes fair and ethical decisions. Either we revise this sentence, or your grade might suffer." The tutor displays certainty by using the either/or logical fallacy, convincing the student that only one alternative exists.

***Provisionalism*:** "You make an interesting comment about the judicial system. You might consider the implications of the word *always*. How would you defend this statement from an opposing viewpoint?" In this example, the tutor begins by supporting the student. She follows this supportive statement with a candid remark about the absolute quality of the word *always.* Finally, the tutor empowers the student by allowing her to solve the problem.

Keeping these two models in mind, we can now revisit Monica and Bret. Monica entered the writing center, late and noticeably anxious. Having been trained to utilize the Listening and Communication models, Bret hesitated before beginning, attempting to read Monica's nonverbal cues. As Bret waited, Monica sensed an opportunity to do some unloading, so she quickly took advantage of it. During Monica's barrage of details about her "stupid, unfair teachers" and her "stupid, demanding boss," Bret made eye contact and listened actively by acknowledging her feelings with one or two words. When he felt he truly understood her feelings, he said, "Wow, you are feeling quite overwhelmed by midterm exams, and the demands of your teachers and supervisor are causing some serious anxiety." The look on Monica's face revealed that she felt relieved that someone understood her dilemma. Finally, Bret granted Monica's wish in a fantasy by saying, "Wouldn't it be great if we could magically make it next week and all this stress would be behind you?" Monica smiled, and Bret proceeded to go through her paper, utilizing supportive behaviors as he did. Noticing that Monica needed to feel in control, Bret encouraged Monica to create solutions for problems in her paper; he also avoided using indifferent responses by practicing effective eye contact, using an appropriate tone of voice, and ultimately helping Monica feel more at ease. This application of supportive behaviors, juxtaposed with Bret's knowledge and experience, helped Monica concentrate on her assignment, increased her confidence, and started the process of providing Monica with the necessary skills to write well independently. After all, isn't this what writing centers are designed to do?

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How to make words breathe: Developing style

The printed word is alive. Writing is not only an elaboration on a theme or thesis but also an extension of the personality and internal intricacies of the writer. It is 50% content and 50% intangible. In other words, *how* something is written is as important to the overall quality of the paper as *what* is written. Exactly what is it that breathes life into a conglomeration of facts, opinions or ideas? If straightforward information forms the bones of prose, then it is personal style that makes up the muscle. Style is the body language of a paper— the method to which emotional depth, visual imagery, and overall tone is bestowed to an army of ink dots marching in formation across the page. Accessing and nurturing a quality as nebulous as individual style is an exercise in personal discovery for writers, and hence, very difficult for a tutor to explain in a tutoring session. The acid test for style is its conspicuous absence. This skill cannot be taught by memorization or reading volumes of articles alone; it must be practiced. The following are some concepts, however, that can clarify style and promote its growth.

1. Read the work of other writers.

There is a way to get a sense of style without writing: read the work of other writers. Become aware of an author's personal style. Ernest Hemmingway wrote with a simple elegance that communicates so effectively because every word was agonized over until the context was perfect. John Steinbeck wrote with a humble mysticism that made the ordinary supernatural. Andre Gide incorporated the characters' surroundings into their psyche and made nature a cerebral entity. Tom Robbins writes like no one else on the planet. Much like osmosis, reading develops an ingrained sense of style in the attentive reader. With an appreciation for style in place, the writer can now turn inward and begin to develop a personal style unique to the individual.

2.Establish the tone of the paper. Integrate the individual personality into what is written; however, avoid letting tone run rampant.

Unlocking the subjective, or personal, sense of style begins with the successful integration of the personality into the format of formal writing. Writing is an extension of the mind. Prose is a tangible extension of the mind's internal workings. Logically, the writer's personality is essential to setting a consistent tone for a paper. An author's opinions, values, and temperament provide a subtle undertone that colors the writing and makes it unique to its creator. A writer with a cynical streak will inject his writing with skepticism. A fellow with a cheerful outlook on life will flavor his work with optimism. A comic personality may use humor to support a thesis or make a point. Setting the tone of the paper is an important step in pre-writing. A paper that shifts from pessimism to an optimistic outlook and then back again with each changing paragraph, or worse yet, with each sentence, is confusing and difficult to read. Much of the readers' confidence in the author is lost when he senses that the writer is vacillating between two or more extremes. But a writer is not bound to stay within the constraints of his own temperament when writing. He may choose to pen a scathing critical paper though he may be quite easy-going. This is perfectly acceptable if the writer is capable of maintaining an even tone throughout the paper. The requirement for setting tone is consistency. It is unwise to shift tone in the middle of a paper and leave the reader emotionally stranded. Also, a word of caution: avoid letting the tone run riot. A cynical person should not allow a paper to become so bitter or sarcastic that it is rendered painful to read. Likewise, being optimistic does not mean being sappy. Humor is most effective in formal writing when well placed and used sparingly. Writing is not an Elvis sighting. It does not have to be festooned with sequins and sideburns to be noticed.

3. Use sentences of varying length.

Style has its roots in grammar. The rigid fence posts of punctuation need a sort of railing to connect them. Since a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, it would seem that simple, direct sentences would be the most effective. But try reading children's books. Simple sentences quickly lose their flavor. Variety provides a spark of interest for the reader. Identical eight word platoons of ink ants lined up in succession will quickly cause the eyes of the reader to glaze over like doughnuts. This is an effective treatment for insomnia, but not a goal for the writer. Sentences should be used as a boxer uses punches. The fighter throws jabs, hooks, uppercuts, and occasionally haymakers, to make his point. Well-written prose should have a theme as strong as any punch thrown in the ring, and the combinations of sentence length and structure should be as varied as a flurry of punches. Simple sentences, compound sentences, questions, speculations, lists, exclamations— the combinations are endless. Knock the reader over with a left-right-left combination of interesting sentences.

4. Strong decisive language communicates most effectively.

Direct language is indicative of pur-

poseful action. Words like *pretty*, *nice*, *fine*, *thing*, and *something* are the politicians of the dictionary. These words are so nondescript and bland that the reader is left stranded, grasping for the meaning implied by such flaccid verbiage. A dance may be pretty when upon a stage, but pirouetting around a point when writing is quite ugly. The English language is equipped with words to conform to any context. A thesaurus is helpful in finding the right word to describe a situation exactly. Use the vast vocabulary available to find words that drive the point home and flex the muscles of the native tongue.

5. Write to appeal to the senses. Imagery provides a spark of life and vitality to prose.

Imagination is a vital component in writing. Knowledge of the topic is important, but what many writers fail to realize is that imagination and creativity play an important role in allowing the reader to absorb the information in the paper comfortably. How long would it take for a headache to set in if one sat down to read the Webster's dictionary for a few hours? Reference volumes are prime examples of dry, informative writing. Perhaps the authors of such droll and antiseptic texts skydive or hunt sharks on their days off, but the writing they do does not reflect any personality or imagination, only straight fact. In the case of reference books this is allowed. Their reason for existence is to provide raw figures and facts. These publications are sources, not prose. But for students, who are almost never asked by instructors to produce a piece of writing suitable for publication in a dictionary, imagination can immensely strengthen the impact their writing will have on the reader. Imagination and creativity are intangible forces, and a definitive "how-to-be-creative" manual does not exist. The best approach is to create an atmosphere in which imagination can stretch its wings and promote creativity. Realize what readers respond to in writing. The stimulation of the senses in the imagination in the mind of the reader makes the words come alive. The imagination of the writer communicates directly with that of the reader by evoking images, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. When completely absorbed in novel or essay, the imagination actively participates by creating a tapestry of sensation in the mind that follows the story unfolding on the page. This is the magic of literature. The use of imagery is the most profound way for words to communicate more than the sum of their individual definitions. Seize readers by the senses and force them to follow.

Take the following example: "The police captured the criminal after a short altercation." The basic meaning of the sentence is clear, but this sentence has no color or depth, nor does it indicate time sequence. Try writing it like this: "After a short altercation, the police captured the fugitive." This time the sequence of events is more apparent. The substitution of the word *fugitive* for *criminal* lends more color to the sentence. Now without telling the reader expressly that the criminal was running from the police, it is inferred by understanding the definition of the word *fugitive.*

To really get a clear mental picture of what is happening, try writing it this way: "Circling like sharks hunting prey, the police surrounded the murderous fugitive, and after a brief but violent struggle, the officers clamped the steel handcuffs on his wrists and stuffed him into the back of a patrol car. "Though slightly longer than the first version, the third sentence gives much more information. What makes it intriguing is that the imagination is used to envision the scene described. The police are described as hunting sharks. They are understood to be aggressive and violent, possibly even angry. Words like *struggle, clamped*, and *stuffed* emphasize the physical nature of the situation. The reader can identify what *steel* feels like against the skin. Using explicit detail and a menacing tone conveys more to the reader than simple text can alone. This is writing that allows the reader to read between the lines. This is body language in prose.

6.Discard distractions such as references to pop culture, religion, and current events except when it is vital to the topic or thesis.

Writing in a classroom or for an employer is a formal process. A surefire method for undermining the integrity of a research paper or formal document is to reference pop culture or current events. Unless the paper is expressly written with these subjects included in the thesis, their inclusion will simply date the paper, making it seem old before its time, or alienate the reader who is not concerned with the state of popular culture at large. Religious references need to be avoided as well, especially as the foundation for an argumentative paper because of the personal nature of faith. Remember, a writer who continually writes about popular culture is a gossip columnist, and the author who constantly refers to religion is a preacher.

Style is more than window dressing. Imagination, tone, and personality help create a paper with clarity and depth. These are not the final manifestations of style; they are the beginning of its growth. With the refinement of individual elements such as creative use of diction and imagery construction, personal style is molded and developed. With practice, a personal and unique style will emerge and become second nature to the writer. It is vital that a writer communicate precisely what is to be said with a fierce determination and a clear focus on style.

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TUTORS' COLUMN

"To assist, or not to assist: What's my job again?"

The writing center I got my start in as a freshman was a place where students dropped off papers for proofing. We were "Writing Associates." I was just another spellchecker. It was a bad country song waiting to happen. Now, two years later, we don't let students drop papers off, they have to stay and work with us. Now, we are "Writing Consultants." I am there helping students become better writers, not turn in a better Joyce paper. We're top forty.

With the hiring of a new director my junior year, the Denison University version of that oh-so-mystical vehicle for peer tutoring, the Writing Center, took a huge step in the right direction. The director came with years of experience in the double digits. But she came from outside. My university is unique; it's a place where outsiders can run into hurdles that tried-and-true Denisonians usually wouldn't. Denison's schtick is that of an isolated Eden upon the hill (the so-called Yale of Ohio). All new hires, administration and faculty both, come to a haughty atmosphere full of self-knowledge and a reluctance to allow pleasant entry to unproven would-be's.

With the new director already facing this hurdle, the problems with unfamiliarity with the campus, the students being served, and the way existing faculty regard the Writing Center became much more paramount. And this is where I (the senior undergraduate tutor already acclimated to the Denison atmosphere) came in. And it wasn't by choice, mind you. I (unwittingly) accepted an offer from the new director (whom I had only met once) to return to campus early and help out with a poster presentation showcasing the "new and improved" Writing Center at the annual all-campus faculty conference. Little did I know, this would thrust me into the position of the unofficial Writing Center Assistant.

Yes, with my budding friendship with the new director and my growing familiarity with the new workings of the Center, I sort of just fell into the administrative role of "sort-of-assistant-to-the-director" guy. And this was a good thing. My investment in the future of the Center grew exponentially, and my leadership skills honed with each hour spent working on the Center administratively. I'm handling paperwork, advertisement and promotion, as well as instigating new policies. All of a sudden, I'm just as much a Writing Center member as I am a student of the English department.

With the extra responsibilities I inherited, a new level of commitment was borne unto me. All of a sudden it wasn't just a job—I work harder and I try to motivate others in an effort to provide the best service we can. I've become a leader, at least enough of one to change my relationship with my fellow tutors. I'm a different person in the eyes of the faculty, administration, and the students who use the Center itself. It feels like people point at me and say, "Look, it's the Writing Center guy." And I take it as a compliment. It means that people think of me as the point-of-contact, which translates into someone-who-can-help-me.

With this in place, the image of the Writing Center is now somewhat affected by my own. In a sense, they've merged. My social behavior, academic performance, and public writing are all viewed by the community with the Writing Center in the back of their minds—and mine. And it's a good thing. The administrative aspect of being the "sort-of-assistant" has strengthened skills that an undergraduate usually doesn't acquire until grad school, and I will have an advantage over my competing graduate school hopefuls. The motivation it provides me is transferring to my studies, my social life, and my friends.

Now if they'd just give me a title. . . .

Jason Hackworth
Denison University
Granville, OH

Director, Academic Skills Achievement Program
California State University Monterey Bay

Job #: MB200-ED606
Functions: Provides coordination and administration for a university-wide academic support program.
Minimum qualifications and experience: Equivalent to a Master's Degree from an accredited college or university and minimum of three years in a coordinating/management position in a student academic support unit.
Specialized skills required: Experience in teaching, academic support, or related experience at an accredited post-secondary institution serving diverse student populations.
Desirable qualifications: A PhD or equivalent degree, an established record of scholarly/professional research, publications, or activities relevant to academic support programs and issues. Post-secondary classroom teaching experience or demonstrated collaborations with academic programs.
Application procedures: Call 831-582-3337 for required CSUMB application form, California Relay Service (for Hearing Impaired) 800-735-2929; visit CSUMB's home page at http://jobs.monterey.edu. AA/EOE/ADA employer

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

April 1: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Rockville, MD
Contact: Jeannie Dadgostar, Writing and Reading Center, Montgomery College, 51 Mannakee Street, Rockville, Maryland 20850. E-mail: jdadgost@mc.cc.md.us

Sept. 28-30: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN
Contact: either Suzanne M. Swiderski at<sswiders@loras.edu> or Larry D. Harred at <larry.d.harred@uwrf.edu

November 2-4, 2000. National Writing Centers Association in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD Conference website: http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca/nwcacon.html

Review of *Tutor's Guide*

(cont. from page 16)

personal narratives and experiences recounted and written about to draw enjoyable and interesting parallels between their lives and writing, showing how insights and experiences they have lived now inform their writing and their tutoring. Bill Macauley, Jr. discloses his comedic adventures driving a delivery truck through strange and frustrating territory, and how that now prompts him to approach tutoring sessions much like his road trips: with a plan. Alice Troupe marvels at a friend's meticulous organizational skills, but finds organization in her own chaos—the same organization she asks her students to find within the seeming mess of their own rhetorical and linguistic chaos. In other words, pay very close attention. These stories are fun, funny, and easy to remember. They also make for great lead-ins (or memory triggers) for tutoring sessions in which you need to call upon the same skills these stories teach. They also might remind you of yourself. This narrative charm assures that you will not forget these stories, nor will you forget the advice connected to them.

Two observations are worth mentioning. Neither is as much a limitation or a weakness as it is a need for some broader consideration given the evolving awareness of institutional responsibility and liability on the one hand, and personnel and/or supervisory issues on the other.

First, there is some oversimplification in the sections which address those moments when students reveal troubling or upsetting details about their personal lives. *A Tutor's Guide* offers good and general initial advice for working through such moments, but stops short of a necessary consideration: the responsibility and accountability that comes with a tutor learning such information. Sometimes information flows quickly in a tutoring session, and a tutor may learn of something disturbing before having had the opportunity to avert that moment. Writing center directors would do well to consult with their institutions' risk managers to learn the details of a tutor's obligations to escalate such knowledge to the director, and for the director to relay that information on to yet another level. Are tutors considered agents of the university? The answer will be institution-specific. If so, however, there may be more institutional responsibility than the book suggests. There also is the risk that tutors, who are helpers by nature, may feel the need to practice beyond their competence to help a student. This is an issue worth exploring.

Second, one more chapter would be useful—one which addresses what tutors should do when another tutor fails to adhere to the writing center's standards and practices. Frankly, I struggled with this suggestion, for it is a shade away from the mission of *A Tutor's Guide*: to help writers one-to-one. However, sometimes the best means to helping a student writer one-to-one is to assure that he/she receives skilled and appropriate attention. A poor experience with a tutor can cause a writer to avoid future trips to the writing center, eclipsing future opportunities to help that student again. A poor tutor also can burden a staff. Peers often find it difficult to confront one another productively, and some advice on when and how to do so (or not to do so) might well avoid or alleviate a thorny issue we all have seen at one time or another.

Those of us who teach and administer at Jesuit colleges or universities do so with two important principles guiding our work: Cura Personalis (a sincere care for the individual needs of each student) and Women and Men for Others. As a group, the fifteen contributors to *A Tutor's Guide* likewise bring these same principles to the forefront of their work and their writing; these are women and men who care very much for their students and who work passionately to help them become better writers. This is evident in every chapter and in the overall idea for the book. Although *A Tutor's Guide* is targeted to writing center tutors and administrators, there is a very clear sense that the book is just as much for the students we and our tutors encounter everyday. It is just as valuable for the discussion and questions it stimulates as it is for the suggestions and resources it offers. In the final analysis, keep *A Tutor's Guide* where it will be easy to find. You will want to refer to it often.

English education within and beyond the writing center: Expectations, examples, and realizations

The Writing Center at Pittsburg (KS) State University has always been intimately associated with our English Education program. Since its inception twenty years ago, the Writing Center has served a twofold purpose: to provide pre-professional laboratory experience for students who desire to become secondary school English teachers; and to serve the campus as most writing centers do. With this in mind, our tutors are enrolled in an undergraduate methods course where students begin to specialize in teaching secondary school composition while they are also trained to serve as tutors in the Writing Center. Presently, this training consists of a videotape introducing tutors to writing center situations such as working with technical writing students, international students, and students from across the curriculum. Each tutor is required to serve in the Writing Center for thirty hours during the semester, which means they work two hours per week for fifteen weeks. This serves as the major component of tutor training, as tutors learn to recognize and resolve writing problems to enhance their future classroom performance.

Because of the empirical nature of the tutoring experience, it seemed to me that a panel of tutors might help express their observations and suggestions for improvement, their expectations and realizations, with an eye toward using their feedback to improve the tutoring experience for incoming English Education students. With this in mind, I assembled a writing center conference panel consisting of David Ferlo, a new tutor enrolled in the composition methods course; Kate Mayo, a recent tutor currently serving as a student teacher in a local school; Christy Wood, a former tutor serving as a second-year teacher in a proximate school district; and, me, the recently appointed Director of the Writing Center. My hope was that by listening to tutors and teachers who were at various stages in their professional development, I ought to be able to further improve the tutoring experience as it relates to helping students become secondary school English teachers. Throughout, I was curious about how well our writing center accomplished its pedagogical mission: to help prepare our English Education students to become writing teachers at the secondary school level. Among other things, I learned that the lines between expectations and realizations were often not as clear as I imagined they might be; so, if things seem a bit murky at times, please put it down to my confusion.

Before sharing some expectations, examples and realizations, I need to note that our panel members are separated by several years of experience. In those years, and particularly in the past two semesters, the Writing Center underwent a physical transformation. Where previous tutors and the writers with whom they worked were self-consciously paired off in isolation, recently the Writing Center has become a more communal, a perhaps more social place as the main table-top working area has been consolidated into a large presence in the center of our room. Tutors can congregate around this area, spread out papers and books more comfortably, and work side-by-side with writers looking together at papers, rather than across a table from one another. This physical proximity is closer to the secondary school teaching experience, an experience I enjoyed for half-a-dozen years at a predominantly African-American high school in Houston, Texas, before going off to graduate school. The recent set-up looks more collaborative than confrontational, and it enables tutors and writers to feel as if they're sharing a composition with an eye toward improving it together, rather than having a tutor evaluate it with an eye toward prescribing changes that are then swallowed like pills by a patient writer. It makes the pedagogical experience seem more like therapy and less like an examination. Additionally, I listened to tutor suggestions for improving the space, and we now have many plants, which add a sense of calm to the Center. Somehow, this makes the tutoring process seem more organic, too. We've also mounted posters of artwork taken from magazines and museum collections. My favorite is a Smithsonian poster of meerkats, which seems highly emblematic of the tutoring experience as we helpless, harmless tutors band together like meerkats for the common, communal good.

And, most importantly for the purposes of English Education, we have created a "teacher's lounge" area modeled after the one where I spent time in a high school. We offer a comfortable couch, a refrigerator, a coffeemaker, and a telephone so that English Education majors are encouraged to spend time in the Writing Center between classes, a situation which has two significant corollaries: one is that tutors are able to take advantage of the professional journals available to them, including *English Education*, *English Journal*, *College English*, and this newsletter among others. Another significant consequence of encouraging tutors to spend time in the "teacher's lounge" is that when their colleagues are overwhelmed by numbers of writers seeking attention, a tutor or two will often rise from the couch and pitch

in. This attitude speaks well to the collegiality and camaraderie I sense in successful secondary schools; I am encouraged and heartened to see it in our English Education majors at a pre-professional level.

Given that the physical space of the Writing Center had been redesigned, the logical next step was to encourage feedback to help us meet the needs of our English Education majors. With this in mind I posed some questions for our panel members, and then waited. Now, I am able to analyze the information which they shared at the conference. Because each panel member wrote a paper for the panel, I quote extensively from their writing with their permission. My feeling is that this approach will be more realistic, more effective, and more equitable than rewriting the panel into my own paper. In this essay, I follow the same order as the panel, moving from the least experienced member to the most experienced member, moving from David to Kate to Christy before concluding with a few thoughts about what we might consider in the future.

To begin, I discovered that initially tutors have little or no idea of what to expect, but they readily accept some premises of the methods course. Because of his developmental position on the panel, I was intensely interested in learning what David Ferlo expected as a tutor. He writes:

> Most of what I thought the Writing Center was going to be was something different from what it really was. I had this strange idea in my head that I would have the answers to every question that every student posed to me. I figured that I would be able to explain to a student their problem and help them with it in a way that their professor would not be able to if only because I had had previous problems with the same thing.

This indicates that David comprehends the essence of peer tutoring and that he practices it in his tutoring. Because David treats writers as peers, he should be able to incorporate the foundation of the composition methods course—writing as process—into his own teaching. These reshaped expectations should be understood as a positive aspect of being able to understand a writer's difficulties. This compassion should stand him in good stead as he teaches writing at the secondary school level.

David also indicates a willingness to help writers with difficult papers, as he realizes that his writing center tutoring will presumably be much like the public school teaching experience he anticipates:

> I prefer working with students whose papers have need of much help. Not only do I expect it will help them improve their writing but I learn how to pick out the problems within a paper which prepares me for when I'll be doing this with my students.

It seems, then, that David has an awareness of the task before him, and of its relationship to his present writing center tutoring experience.

When we move to Kate Mayo, we see an increased level of sophistication. After several months of student teaching she easily realizes how university writing center tutoring differs from teaching English at the secondary school level. For instance, she notes a major difference in essay topics; she also notes that university students have to demonstrate writing ability across the curriculum more stringently than secondary school students:

> One thing I have noticed is that the types of papers that are being done at the high school level are geared more towards the English classes. This was one thing that I had to get used to in the University Writing Center; the papers came from all across the curriculum. . . . As an English major, this is the only time you are exposed to writing about things other than a literary work or self-generated ideas. This is beneficial because you are introduced to different types of writing styles along with the varied topics.

Along with the comment regarding style, Kate also makes an insightful observation regarding high schools' approach to a fundamental aspect of university writing centers:

> The high schools try to stress "writing across the curriculum," but this rarely works, in my opinion, because teachers tend to spend more of their time teaching subjects rather than having kids write about them. I can understand this to an extent, but I do feel that writing across the curriculum is still important because it gets kids in the habit of effectively communicating ideas through writing. A competent writer makes a capable reader and, furthermore, a proficient communicator. This is a skill in life that all should try to achieve and enhance.

Here Kate understands the relationship between writing centers and writing across the curriculum programs, as well as the rationale for establishing and maintaining such programs. She also accepts the ideals behind teaching writing in classes other than English. If more subject teachers had her attitude, secondary school English teachers wouldn't feel so isolated as they teach composition, which is a combination of reading and writing, rereading and rewriting.

Kate's experience as a student teacher also informs several other cogent observations about the differences between working as a writing center tutor and teaching in public school. She remarks about time constraints:

> Another thing is that, as a tutor in the University Writing Center, the contact is more one on one. We are given enough time to help the students with any problems they have with their writing. There is also no fear of failure in the writing center. The students who come in know they are not being graded on their paper; most of them come in willingly and have a desire to improve their writing. As a teacher, I must divide my time between anywhere from 17 to 27 students. At any given time, they may

> all need help, and I am not able to spend as much time as they need or as I want to give.

Kate goes on to explain the relationship between grades and the lack of revision by secondary school English students when she notes: "Some students do not take the idea of a grade seriously enough to want to improve their paper before they hand it in; therefore, they do not seek the help they may need." She expects to reshape this attitude in the future with the following strategy:

> Something I foresee for when I get my own classroom is the development of a system where the students must have a conference of some sort with me before they begin their paper, during the writing process, and after they have handed it in. These could be set up in five-minute intervals and could take place before school, after school, or even during a given time in class.

Apparently, her writing center experience is capable of informing her expectations as a secondary school English teacher. The conferences she will require seem to be based on realizing the motivational relationship between improving writing by seeking help and earning a higher grade as she tutored in the Writing Center.

Finally, Kate looks ahead to the day when she will be a faculty member and can apply her experience as a tutor and a student teacher in order to realize a more far-flung expectation: working with writing centers and writing labs in secondary schools:

> Something I would like to see come about at Frontenac (Junior/ Senior High School, where she had her student teaching experience) as well as in more high schools is a type of writing center that is not just a writing lab. These are two different things. A center, to me, is where students can go for help with everything from grammar to sentence structure to organization. The tutors are their peers, peers that have a strong interest in language and its functions. This operation could be watched over by a volunteer teacher, or the administration could see it as another position altogether and hire someone to oversee the center full-time. Writing labs in schools tend to be rooms set aside for use by the English classes or other classes who are writing papers. These rooms usually hold several computers and a few printers, and they are used primarily in the final stage of writing, the publishing stage. I believe that if writing centers were instituted along with the already present labs students would be more apt to get help before the publishing stage; this is where most of the help is needed anyway.

Kate's point speaks to her experience as a writing center tutor: she worked with college-level writers much as she works with secondary school students in her classroom: helping them along to a final stage of the writing process. That she understands the difference between sitting in a high-tech lab to publish a document, and working with a peer tutor to recognize and resolve writing problems indicates that she and David have much in common, despite the obvious difference in their experience. This indication leads me to believe that our writing center has taken English Education and moved it from our university campus to a secondary school campus.

As you might expect, the more you teach, the more you have to say. This is certainly the case with our third panel member—Christy Wood—who is now a second-year teacher. An obvious major difference between Christy's tutoring experience and her teaching experience is that now Christy balances more responsibilities. In addition to teaching Junior Honors English and Senior English, she also teaches French. Furthermore, she is the head coach of the Varsity Cheerleading Squad and the Freshman Cheerleading Squad, and sponsors the Pep Club, as well as the Language Masters group, and the Senior class. Certainly, these are activities for which no English Education program can really prepare its students; now that I am aware of the various activities which she undertakes, at least I can caution tutors that they had best be prepared for working longer hours as a teacher than they do as tutors. Her experience as a tutor, however, did prepare her for some basic situations in ways that she can recognize. For example, she expected that unless she learned from her experience, she would encounter difficulties with poorly-communicated writing assignments:

> I knew from working with confused, frustrated students in the writing center the common problem of miscommunication between teachers regarding writing assignments. I knew the importance of the teacher clearly stating the assignment, the expectations, giving the assignment not only verbally, but in writing, and following up with students to make sure they understand the assignment. So, I vowed to always do my best to clearly state the assignment and expectations verbally and in writing, and to check each student for comprehension. I have put this into practice.

This practice addresses and resolves one of the most frustrating aspects about tutoring in a writing center. With documented writing assignments at hand, a tutor or a secondary school English teacher can more effectively assist a writer who asks for help on a paper.

Christy also discusses the need for invention techniques that she learned from her English Education experience:

> Also, from tutoring students in the writing center, I knew that once the assignment is given there will be some students who can jump in and start right off, but for the most, the hardest part about writing is just getting started, getting that first paragraph down. So, I knew the value of whole class activities to help generate topic ideas—brainstorming, webbing, mapping, asking the right questions to get students'

> thoughts going in the right direction. I also knew that to begin with, many students need an organized structure, a step by step process which tells them what type of information should go into each paragraph so that their paper has some organization. So, then, as a teacher I knew that I must do class activities to get students started with a good topic for their writing assignment, and to help them with the structure of this assignment.

These, and other invention and organization strategies, including journals and narrative essays, have carried over from her teacher training and met with success, for Christy tells us: "The students had fun, I had fun, and the writing was fun." From my point of view, it is good to see examples of expectations being realized.

Because of her greater teaching experience, Christy's realizations deserve to be heeded, and shared with other English Education majors who tutor in a writing center. Like David and Kate, she understands the value of being able to work individually with writers:

> I have realized that if a writing center is run well, not only the students coming in for assistance in their writing prosper, but also the tutors helping them prosper. Tutors develop skills which they will use in the classroom for life. By working one-on-one with students from many different backgrounds, cultures, and with many different writing assignments and problems tutors get first-hand experience in helping a student to feel success with what they have written.

Christy shares some further practical advice for tutors planning to become secondary school English teachers as she goes beyond touting the advantages of individual instruction to include incorporating tutoring skills into classroom techniques:

> I would encourage tutors to do their best to develop the one-on-one tutoring skills which can help individuals the most, to think about some of the common problems that you see with students' writing and how you could address those problems with whole class instruction instead of one-on-one instruction. The realities of classroom teaching are that because of time constraints and student/teacher ratio, teachers must address as many of the common problems of students as they can in whole class instruction and activities. Teachers thus must think ahead and try to decide what problems may arise with a certain writing assignment so that they can address these problems first as a whole class. Then, teachers must as quickly and thoroughly as possible address individual writing problems.

After listening to the panel members, after collaborating with them on a critical framework for feedback as if it were a home being constructed by Habitat for Humanity to be given to a deserving family, and after having reread our original contributions, I would like to conclude with three realizations that will inform my future expectations. With three words: *authority*, *balance* and *compassion* I hope to improve my work as a writing center director charged with helping prepare our tutors to fill substantial positions in public education.

Authority must be shared with English Education students and tutors so that they may comfortably assume roles as writing teachers. Sharing authority should mean that they are competent in helping writers resolve problems—which David enjoys—and in designing writing assignments that are clear—as Christy does—while implementing strategies ensuring that writing as a process is recognized—as Kate plans to do.

Balance must be achieved so that our students and tutors will not be overwhelmed by duties and responsibilities that are part and parcel of being secondary school teachers. Achieving this balance means meeting needs of students in an English classroom, in writing situations outside an English classroom, and in extracurricular activities. This sense of balance also demands maintaining contact between those of us in the academy and those of us in public education, so that if it is necessary to "kick a few bricks out of the ivory tower" and use them to build two-way bridges with public schools, then I advocate doing so.

Compassion must be practiced so that writing teachers remain aware of the difficulties faced by writers at any educational level, as David exemplifies when he works one-on-one as a peer tutor, as Kate realizes with her commentary about the connections between reading and writing across the curriculum, and as Christy expects by incorporating invention strategies into whole class writing techniques. Further, this compassion should be practiced not only between secondary school English teachers and their students, but also between university professionals and our students.

By sharing authority, by achieving balance, and by practicing compassion we can help English Education students and tutors meet expectations, learn from examples, and transform realizations into sound pedagogical practices as we work together within the writing center to move together beyond the writing center.

John T. Ikeda Franklin, David Ferlo, and Kate Mayo
Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, KS
and
Christy Wood
Labette County High School
Altamont, KS

Book Review

Rafoth, Ben, ed. *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. Westport, CT: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 2000. (186 pages, ISBN: 0-86709-495-8, $17, plus $4 shipping/handling)
Order from: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 88 Post Road West, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881. Phone: 800-793-2154; fax: 800-847-0938: website orders: www.boyntoncook.com

Reviewed by Libby Miles and Christine Fox Volpe, University of Rhode Island (Kingston, RI)

As tutors first and foremost, we, Libby and Christine, were reading *A Tutor's Guide* for ways to invigorate our own tutoring. As writing center director and assistant director, we also read for staff development ideas—either techniques for talking about tutoring, for building staff community, or for reinforcing a shared notion of the work we do together. On both counts, many chapters were satisfying and useful—so much so that we now have a separate list of potentially useful ideas for our staff, students, and center at the University of Rhode Island.

As the title suggests, *A Tutor's Guide* is written for tutors, and in his introduction Rafoth promises that the collected essays will "take everyday events in tutoring sessions and connect them to theory and good practice, not in a comprehensive or encyclopedic way, but in a manner tutors can relate to" (msp 6). For the most part, the chapters deliver on that promise; in fact, the most successful chapters are those written by peer tutors themselves (see especially "Tutoring in Unfamiliar Subjects" by Alexis Greiner).

When we began to discuss our reactions to Rafoth's manuscript, we realized that each of us responded the same way. In short, the chapters we particularly like are—above all—useful. For example, we appreciate those chapters offering specific suggestions for ways to deal with common writing center issues. The editor and contributors help us out by separating an annotated "Further Reading" section from the obligatory works cited. This is far more useful for tutors looking for answers than a list of books with no explanations. Likewise, ample cross references between chapters will help tutors who are using this book as a resource, to troubleshoot after an especially perplexing session.

Several chapters are worth singling out for praise. Running through them is a commitment to collaboration, and they provide some valuable frameworks for managing the "line" (Molly Wingate's term) between tutor responsibility and student responsibility. We like the emphasis in these chapters on setting examples or modeling good strategies for writing and revision rather than doing it for a student, no matter how tempting that might be.

Along these lines of shared responsibility between student and tutor, Alexis Greiner's chapter (mentioned above), strikes just the right balance and tone, while offering clear suggestions for approaching sessions in which the tutor knows nothing about the content—what Greiner calls a "knowledge gap" (msp 138). Her approach is truly collaborative because the writer is trusted with the content while the tutor and writer will work on the delivery, focusing on rhetorical concerns such as how effectively the writer meets the reader's expectations. For tutors, this chapter is also helpful because students often come to writing centers with writing-in-the-disciplines papers which can be intimidating to tutors.

Other chapters emphasize the importance of being flexible: to be willing to shift gears if something isn't working, and not to expect to be a perfect tutor each and every time. This message infuses the book. For example, the first chapter, William Macauley's "Setting the Agenda for the Next Thirty Minutes" stresses not only the need to set an agenda with the student, but also to remain open to taking other routes when it seems appropriate. In her chapter, "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers," Mickey Harris offers concrete suggestions for bringing students out of their shells, and encourages tutors to remember that "[w]hen one [strategy] doesn't seem to be working or doesn't fit the way we tutor, we move on to another one. That's what makes tutoring so challenging and finally, so rewarding" (msp 58). Harris also explains that we sometimes need to make the difficult decision to just let a student go.

In "Can You Proofread This?" Beth Rapp Young gently reminds us that sometimes proofreading *is* the right thing to do, and she offers concrete suggestions for doing it while building a language with students so they know how to ask for something else the next time. As a fresh approach to proofreading in our center, we are thinking of creating a poster advertising "strategies for learning how to proofread" that distills some of the strategies listed in Young's chapter—but also including our favorite "reading backwards" technique.

Several chapters throughout the book encourage tackling rhetorical issues during a session. Lea Masiello's "Style in the Writing Center: It's a Matter of Choice and Voice," for example, offers concrete suggestions for dealing with such comments as "awk," which often point to a writer's difficulty meeting the reader's expectations. Such comments are sometimes difficult to decode, and a student has no idea what the teacher is looking for. Masiello's approach is valuable because she gets at how the writer's motivation might conflict with the reader's expectation. Alice L. Trupe's "Organizing Ideas: Focus Is the Key" further emphasizes rhetorical concerns by focusing on organization as a way to satisfy the reader. Trupe offers some tips that might

be particularly useful for new tutors. And while she only hints at this in her further reading list, the suggestions in this chapter will be useful not only for native speakers but for ESL students as well.

Beyond the particularly valuable chapters we have singled out, *A Tutor's Guide: Writing One to One* contains dozens of useful little nuggets throughout. In almost every chapter, we found something we wanted to enact in our own sessions, our own center. For example, William Macauley advocates—literally, pictorially—mapping an agenda for the session with students from the outset. Although most tutors probably do some kind of agenda-setting with the student at the beginning of each session, and many of us may even doodle what that agenda might be on the scrap paper at the tutoring table, Macauley's strategy makes it clear to tutors and students alike that negotiating the agenda is an expected part of each and every session. For our center, we now envision a stack of scrap paper with "SESSION MAP" at the top and an assortment of colored pens, making mapping materials available and visible, and thus a more comfortable part of a tutoring routine.

Likewise, also visible to the writers working in the center, we might take some of the typically creative writing strategies presented by Wendy Bishop, and put them on our inspiration walls. Currently, those walls are decorated with various writerly sayings and an assortment of photographic and poster art—Bishop's chapter convinced us that classical notions of imitatio might supplement the visual inspiration we try to provide. Along the same vein, we'd like to reinforce Rafoth's conceptualization of outside sources as "backup singers," perhaps as a new handout, or as a poster in the tutoring area. Finally, on a bulletin board in the staff resource area, we would like to cull all the strategies for engaging reluctant writers offered in chapters by Mickey Harris, Sandra Eckard, and Wendy Bishop.

Overall, however, we have one major concern with the conception of the book. Rafoth states in his introduction that he wants the book to "help you think through *problems*" (msp 6, emphasis added) that regularly arise in writing centers. At first glance, this seems like a good idea; as he says, this "is basically the same approach to *problems* that writing center directors and other composition specialists seek" (msp 6, emphasis added). By the end of the book, however, we felt that this inherently negative focus is a problematic framework to guide the whole project.

Because of the continual negative implied by an emphasis on writing center *problems*, Rafoth's approach forces authors, tutors, and their students into some uncomfortable, and ultimately unsatisfying, roles. As a result, the *student writer* too often appears to be the cause of the problem. As a whole, the approach of the book reinforces the (unintentional) message that there are the dream students we all long to work with, and then there are the "problems"—emotionally-charged writers, under-prepared writers, shy writers, nervous writers, virtual writers, writers with other dialects, other cultures, other languages, other disciplines, other learning styles and abilities. With this frame, it is too easy for writing center workers to blame recalcitrant or under-prepared students for a session's failure rather than listening—hard—to what the writer is, and is not, saying. In our center, we don't think about these issues as *problems*; they are at the heart of our work, and they present challenges, opportunities, and a different kind of excitement to our ongoing collaboration.

The matter of problems continues to the end of the book, where Rafoth has included six "Topics for Discussion." They, too, are relentlessly negative in tone and approach. The first, "Doing Something about Bad Assignments," begins by blaming teachers for the disengagement of their students. It then asks tutors to consider what the center might do to intervene. The second topic, "Due Process for Plagiarism," encourages writing center workers to learn more about the students' rights in plagiarism cases, ostensibly with the aim toward making sure they are upheld. The rest of the discussion prompts feel disconnected from the book itself, and it is not clear to either of us how they would enrich our staff meetings. The book is stronger without them.

In the end, we both feel *A Tutor's Guide: Writers One to One* is a good read for new tutors and directors because it offers so many real examples with concrete suggestions. If we judge it by whether it helps us in our centers, with our students, to create "really useful knowledge," then this book is certainly worth having on a staff resource shelf.

Reviewed by Todd Krug, St. Joseph's University (Philadelphia, PA)

The history of writing centers is a history of progress: upgraded and expanded spaces, improved technology and enhanced tutor training. In contrast, the variables of student-tutor interaction have not progressed or changed much at all. Some students still come to writing centers expecting or hoping to find a fix-it shop; ELS tutorials bring added challenges and frustrations for tutors; quiet or uncooperative students resist being engaged in dialogue by tutors; and the internet has redefined the ways students think about and conduct research. Identifying the problems that arise from these issues is easy. Knowing how to confront and overcome them is the far more difficult challenge. This is the formidable task the contributors to *A Tutor's Guide* undertake, sharing practical and useful insights from their daily experiences as writing center specialists.

The premise of *A Tutor's Guide* is simple: "to take everyday events in tutoring sessions and connect them to

theory and good practice, not in a comprehensive way, but in a manner tutors can relate to." The fifteen contributors identify tutoring dilemmas that many have encountered, some have written about, but few have confronted with such useful perspectives and overall common sense. They do so by applying almost twenty years of theory to their practice, distilling research to support their day-to-day solutions to common though difficult writing center issues. Here is a more detailed glance at the publication.

Chapters 1 and 2 solidly address the fundamentals: beginning each tutoring session with a plan and guarding against tutor-centered sessions. The next three chapters carefully and thoughtfully explore more delicate territory: tutoring in emotionally charged sessions; engaging reluctant writers; and breaking down tutor-student barriers by teaching tutors to capitalize on perceived similarities between themselves and the students they tutor. Chapters 6 through 9 move the book towards rhetoric, style and creativity, with a look at tutoring to enhance creativity, develop style, organize ideas and write analytically. These chapters speak to what should be some of the most rewarding of tutoring moments, and the authors show clearly how to capitalize on these moments. Chapters 10 through 14 take a topic-by-topic (or issue-by-issue) focus on day-to-day problems everyone will recognize: tutoring ESL writers; tutoring in unfamiliar subjects; examining the apprehensions and benefits of on-line tutoring and on-line research; and exploring effective (and unproductive) proofreading techniques. *A Tutor's Guide's* closing chapter offers well chosen and multiple resources ranging from books to articles to style manuals to internet sites. Of particular value is the book's final thirty pages, which offer six pertinent topics (such as "Doing Something About Bad Assignments") that "you can talk about in staff meetings, reflect on in a journal, or just ponder."

Speaking on behalf of his contributors, the editor self-discloses that he and they "had to imagine" their audience through "a good deal of thought." Their thought served their creative purpose and their audience's informational needs well. To parrot some of my own students' jargon, the contributors "keep it real" for their audience—real in the problems they identify, real in the suggestions they offer, and real in the fact that they recognize no suggestion is formulaic or universally applicable. Additional regard lies in each chapter's parallel organization: an introduction, background, suggestions, counterpoints to the suggestions and complexities, further reading, and works cited. Overall, *A Tutor's Guide* has been created much like a fine automobile: beautifully designed, superbly engineered and crafted with exceptional attention to detail.

At another level, this is a book about stories—about wonderfully on-task

(cont. on page 9)

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