WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

To all the members of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER group (including one of our newest and most distant members, Glen Gabbard in Pago Pago, American Samoa), I will use the occasion of the last newsletter of the semester to wish you all a summer that is pleasant, productive, and—if possible—also restful. Do, though, continue to send your articles, donations of $2 to help defray duplicating and mailing costs (with checks made payable to me), and names of new members to:

> Muriel Harris, editor
> WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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There is a small gold mine of resources for Writing Labs hidden in Cambridge, Massachusetts, disguised as an elementary and learning disabilities publisher. It's called Educators Publishing Service and its address is 75 Moulton Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. I've found that many of their materials—workbooks, especially—are well-suited for many Basic Writing students, despite their intended application to learning disabled children. A favorite of mine, for example, The Spell of Words, is a spelling book designed for dyslexics, but it works well on a narrow range of spelling problems of "regular" BW students. Other useful materials focus on phonics, spelling, handwriting, reading, vocabulary, grammar, testing, and some composition. You can't build an entire course or workshop program around any one of their books, but you may direct them, as supplemental resources, toward very specific language problems your students may have. My contact there is Robert G. Hall; if any of this sounds interesting to you, write him for their small catalog.

> H. Eric Branscomb
> Writing Center
> Northern Essex Comm. College

THE DEPARTMENTAL HANDBOOK

All writing labs suffer from at least one common problem: how to coordinate the activities of the lab with the regular English classes. Putting it another way, how do the lab personnel teach elements of grammar and composition so as to mesh nicely (or at least not disagree completely) with the individual requirements (and whims) of a department of 35 full-time members and a dozen part-time instructors? Surely every director has been confronted with an irate professor waving a paper and saying, "He swears you told him to do it this way in the lab. Don't you know anything about composition?" Such division can undermine the whole operation of a lab. The professor feels he has been stabbed in the back by his colleague, and naturally is reluctant to send other students to the lab. The student, caught in the middle, probably determines that all these people are crazy and that he might as well do it the way he thinks is correct. The lab personnel, not wishing any further blowups, must either say, "Oh, you're in Dr. X's class, so you should do it this way," or present the student with a series of options and force the student to make the choice on his own. The result is that the effectiveness, to say nothing of the morale, of the lab is diminished.

To alleviate this problem I am trying a new program here at Georgia Tech this quarter. Essentially, it involves having the faculty write—collectively—a handbook of rhetoric and usage. I have so far identified some 45 problem areas (ranging from commas after introductory elements to an effective concluding paragraph). I have asked as many members of the department as I can to write a "section" of the handbook on one particular problem. Each "section" is one typewritten page and should contain all the necessary rules, requirements and variations for

that particular problem, together with some examples of how to do it (or how not to do it). Each "section" is reviewed by a committee of three experienced composition teachers who check to be sure that the "rules" are indeed generally accepted by most of the department members. Once the committee has approved the "section," I put it on a ditto master and run off several hundred copies. One copy goes to each faculty member "for his or her information"; the others are given to students who come by the lab for help with this particular problem.

This handbook will, once we complete the project, reduce the friction between lab personnel and faculty members significantly. I have tried to choose carefully which faculty members write which sections. For example, if a certain faculty member is known to have a passion for subject-verb agreement mistakes, then he is the one asked to write that section. Thus, to a limited degree at least, the faculty member can be sure that the information the lab gives out about a particular error he or she is especially concerned with will be "correct." The handbook also allows us to individualize our instruction. We have one faculty member who is fond of the comment "syntax." I can have him write a one-page synopsis of what he means by that term and include it in the handbook--even though only his students may ask the lab personnel about it. The handbook also simplifies the job of the lab personnel tremendously. They need only give the student a copy of the page with his particular error, let the student read the material carefully, go over it with the student, and then, if the student still has problems, they can go to published books and assign exercises. For most of our students, the one-page summary, together with an exercise or additional examples, is sufficient to correct the problem.

The main problem with the "departmental handbook" approach is a logistical one. All faculty members that I have approached have expressed willingness--even eagerness--to write a section. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm generally flags before they have completed the work. I have had to cajole, pressure, and otherwise nag my colleagues to complete their sections. I had foolishly believed I could complete this project in about four weeks. A more realistic time will be ten weeks. But since the sections are independent units, we are able to use each

for the whole project to be completed.

The problem of conflicting standards may be more severe at Tech than at some other schools, since we do not use a standard handbook of rhetoric in any of our courses. But, I believe that even schools with a standard text may find my departmental handbook method of benefit in unifying the information presented and involving the department as a whole in the operation of the writing lab.

Robert L. Meredith
Georgia Tech

Using Video-tapes to Train Writing Lab Tutors

I'd like to share a technique we've found useful in training peer tutors for our Writing Lab at Northern Kentucky University. Our tutors, junior and senior English majors enrolled in English 385 (The Teaching of English) who assist our Lab instructors with groups of four to six developmental writing students, receive only about four hours of training before they begin working in the Lab. In order to maximize the usefulness of this all-too-brief training session, we created a video-tape of tutor/student interaction which we hope would effectively illustrate some of the things tutors should and should not do in the Lab.

With the invaluable help of NKU's Educational Media Service, we devised six brief scripts and then taped the scenes using the Lab staff in the student/tutor roles. Three of the scenes presented negative models; faced with his student's tangled sentence structure, the tutor gives up and dictates his or her sentences into the paper; ignoring the student's request for help in rewriting a paper, the tutor focuses instead on the proofreading errors; reacting to a subject/ verb agreement error in a paper, the tutor first overwhelms and finally loses his student with a long recitation of the rules. The other three scenes presented positive tutoring models: the first illustrates how, through a series of questions, the tutor can help a "blocked" student discover material for a paper; the second shows a tutor helping a student to punctuate his paper through reading it aloud with him; in the third, which we considered our pièce de résistance, the tutor helps the student revise a weak paper.

A "seventh" scene, it turned out, was not simulated: as the camera man waited for the "actors" to arrive, he filmed a Lab staff member as she worked with a student rewriting a paper; thus we got the opportunity to compare the effectiveness of both approaches. Almost all of us noted afterwards how easy it was to get into our roles, to forget about the camera.

Editing the two hours of raw tape was time consuming but illuminating. We soon discovered a bonus in the project; as we saw ourselves "acting" the role of tutor, we discovered some of our own weaknesses. Our body language alone was revealing; we (rather than the student) held the pencil, we leaned, rocked, gestured with our hands, and scrunched up our faces. We were altogether too active, doing too much of the work in the session,seldom giving our student the time or opportunity to think for himself. In the end, we discarded two scenes: the lesson on reading aloud for punctuation (the student/actor couldn't do it, which should tell us something), and our hopelessly muddled "piece" on revising (the paper described an appendicitis and somehow we got stuck on the sentence, "I hate for anyone to touch my body.").

The edited tape we showed to the tutors ran about thirty minutes. There's no doubt that the tape made the training session more effective than the one last semester. Before the session, the tutors had been given copies of the writing discussed in each scene, and were asked to note how they would respond. We stopped the tape after each scene and asked the students to evaluate the student/tutor interaction and to compare it with what they would have done. A lively discussion ensued. It is interesting to note too that while the Lab staff found the unsimulated scene the most valuable (the others seemed too staged, too obviously bad/or good), the tutors seemed to learn more from the others.

Having had some success with video-tape in these tutor training sessions, we can now see other possibilities for its use in the Lab. We were so impressed by what we learned about our own tutoring as we watched ourselves, that we've encouraged even the most camera-shy staff members to tape one of their sessions. And next semester, when for the first time peer tutors will be enrolled in a Lab practicum, working in the Lab for credit, we'll require each of them to tape a session. At this point, we see it as probably the best way for them (and us) to evaluate their effectiveness as tutors.

Fran Zaniello
Writing Lab Coordinator
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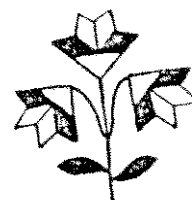
Report of the 1979 Special Interest Session Discussion Group on Training Tutors

At CCCC in Minneapolis, Jeanette Harris (East Texas State University) and Lil Brannon (University of North Carolina-Wilmington) addressed the problem that Writing Lab Directors must face: how to train peer tutors. Often our tutors are either very knowledgeable about the content area but lack the ability to communicate effectively with poorly prepared students or affable but lack the content knowledge. Therefore, we need to train our tutors on both the cognitive and affective levels. The participants in this session were involved in the peer tutor training workshop that we devised to meet this need. The cognitive skill training centers around a tutor handbook. This handbook, sent to students once they are assigned to the lab, is divided into sections focusing on the history and philosophy of the lab, the records and procedures, the materials and other available resources, and meetings. Also included in the handbook are such items as how to conduct an initial interview, to request materials, to develop materials, and to become a more effective tutor. This affective skill training involved the explaining of a two-day workshop we conduct for our tutors. The workshop explains the various tutor-tutee relationships, the need for self-awareness, the use of self-awareness, the need to be aware of others, and the styles of tutoring. The participants in this session were given affective training exercises, free writing exercises, and role-playing techniques that we use with our tutors. The handouts from the session are available upon request.

Lil Brannon
Director of Composition and
The Writing Center
Univ. of North Carolina-
Wilmington

COMPUTER ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER MANAGEMENT AT JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

The computer management of the Academic Skills Center at Joliet Junior College is simple and relatively inexpensive. It begins with a time clock, a student, and a time card.

The previously-keypunched time card carries the following information: student name, Social Security Number (which is used as the student I.D. throughout the college), course name and section number, instructor's initials, and major.

The student punches in his arrival time on the card with the automatic time clock. Before he leaves, his instructor or a lab person writes in his keyed lesson number of completed work for the period spent in the Academic Skills Center and initials this as verification. When the student leaves, he punches in his departure time.

Later this information is keypunched by the secretarial staff. The cards are read into the computer, sorted on disks, and then the report is printed.

Every two weeks the Academic Skills Center instructors receive class printouts giving the following information: student name, total hours in Academic Skills Center to date, last date of student attendance, major, instructor initials, and a coded list of completed lessons. The original printout is X-copied and reduced for instructor use.

Two separate printouts are provided about referrals: reading and writing. Referral students are those who refer themselves on a short-term basis for help or those referred by instructors, advisors, counselors, etc. These printouts are given to the instructors who work with these referrals.

An NCR computer system is used for this management. All programs are written in standard COBOL by the staff of Joliet Junior College and are available at no cost to other schools. Mr. Ron Bleed, Data Processing Department, Joliet Junior College, is responsible for this program.

Myra J. Linden
Joliet Jr. College

BOOK REVIEW

Jacobus, Lee A. The Sentence Book. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (approximate price: $4.95)

Jacobus's Sentence Book is one of the more useful materials available on teaching sentence structure. Covering all aspects of the sentence—including grammar and usage, fragments and run-ons, sentence construction, style, and rhetorical devices—it makes the student an active participant in the sentence writing process. Rather than the "fill-in" exercises found in many programs, the main thrust of The Sentence Book is to provide students with many opportunities to write their own sentences following the models in the book. In addition, students are asked to apply what they have learned to their own writings. Because the emphasis is on the writing of sentences, grammatical terminology, which bogs down many students, is kept to a minimum. Punctuation rules appear as necessary throughout the book, allowing students to use them in their own writing immediately. Although no one "program" can be expected to solve a student's deep-rooted writing problems, The Sentence Book, used judiciously, is a helpful tool for those who need to improve their sentence structure.

I would like to urge other WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER members to share some of your opinions about books or materials which you have successfully or unsuccessfully used. The following information concerning a book or materials would be useful: author's name, title, publisher, approximate price, format, content, usefulness, and weaknesses. Please send this information to me at the Cooperative Learning Center, Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth, Mass. 02740. I look forward to hearing from you.

Susan Glassman
Writing Lab Director
Southeastern Mass. University

Punctuation—To Hold Together,
Not To Divide

I wish some English teacher of long ago had driven into my head the one basic, common-sense reason for punctuation—just given me a hint. It never happened. From as far back as I can remember, this or that mark of punc-

tuation--the comma, semi-colon, dash, and by all means the period and parentheses--was to "separate" or "set off" something. Wrong. Each and every punctuation mark in a sentence (and this goes for the period too) is there to hold together in one coherent unit the most important invention in civilization: the subject-verb-complement, a thought, an idea.

The most complicated punctuation in our best prose demonstrates not a separating or setting off but a joining, balancing, blending, introducing, pausing, coordinating, approaching, relating, modifying, inserting, and emphasizing. Certainly the rules of punctuation are not to be scrapped, but the concept of separation seems misleading. The sooner we can nail down for our students the one central function of punctuating, the sooner and more securely we can tap in the smaller nails and tacks that follow.

Oxford Stroud
Auburn University

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(As you will note, the ERIC Clearinghouse system has requested that it be included on our mailing list and will now have on file all issues of the newsletter beginning with Volume 3, No. 1, which was the first issue of last September.)