THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Included in this first issue of the 30th volume of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* is a hearty welcome back! For those who have been part of our group of *WLN* readers for more years than any of us cares to count, you'll know that we've had the same "look" for over a decade and have also not raised prices for far too long. But like the rest of the world, we have faced rising costs for the dreaded "P" words: paper, printing, and postage. And, for our 30th anniversary, we've decided it's time for an updated look.

So, beginning in January (we hope), *WLN* will look a bit different. If all goes well, it'll be a more attractive, more colorful, more easily readable publication. And at that time, we'll have to raise the yearly rates. Not much, but enough to keep *WLN* afloat but still keep it within the realm of being the bargain I want it to be. For anyone renewing or joining before January 1st, our current rates will apply. (How's THAT for an incentive to renew soon?)

This issue is filled with articles I hope you'll find interesting, useful, illuminating, and thoughtful, and our poet laureate, John Blazina, a tutor at York University, in Toronto, is back with another of his masterpieces of "Ungrammatical Verse" (see p. 8).

Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Taking care of business at the writing center

A colleague who teaches business writing here at the University of Southern California likes to say that the academic world is no different from the so-called "real world"—it just pays less. I laugh and agree, because I know what he means. But, in fact, he is only partly right. Returning to university teaching after fifteen years as a working writer and consultant for an international marketing communications agency, I know how those two worlds can both mirror each other and exist in totally different realms. In my current role as director of the university's writing center, I also know that each has something to contribute to the other.

Writing in a business environment has a bracing effect on a writer used to the conventions of academic writing. At its best, business writing is self-consciously addressed not to the intellectually curious but to decision makers. It values brevity and clarity over expansiveness and ambiguity. While it may at times educate and inform, its main goal is to get things done. It cuts to the chase.

As a working writer, I had to be results driven. I often used my analytical and problem-solving skills and my ability to quickly research a new subject. I also developed a heightened awareness of audience, an appreciation for the rhetorical dimension of document design, and a set of stylistic strategies for making complex information easy to read without compromising its integrity.

The relationship between business and writing is reciprocal. While writing serves the goals of business, business organizes writing as an enterprise of its own. Collaborating with and supervising other writers and graphic designers on projects for corporate clients, I had to acquire organizational skills for completing deliverables on budget and on time. Meanwhile, compared to academic writing, the stakes were much higher. It was like taking a pass/fail course in which you have to get an A+ to pass. As I said, it has a bracing effect on a writer.

Corporate models

Given this background, when I think of how a university writing center might work, I tend to model it after the various in-house agencies that exist within large corporations to serve other departments within the company, all of which are potential "clients."

If you are in a communications department, for example, someone with a new product can ask you to develop, design, and produce promotional "literature" to introduce and sell that product. You manage their expectations and do everything you can to deliver what the client wants by an agreed deadline.

Like any vendor, the continued existence and growth of an in-house agency depends on its ability to satisfy and exceed the expectations of its clients. So, as much as possible, you use your expertise to "add value" to the project. Finally, you deliver service with a smile. People like doing business with people who make them feel comfortable.

Also, you don't wait for business to come to you. You make yourself known by aggressively promoting your service through your organization's communication channels. More of a challenge is doing your own market research, proactively developing new services and new ways to package and deliver your current ones.

Marketing does this to you. It gets you thinking about how well your services meet the felt needs of your client base. You don't offer something that people ought to want. It should be something they actually do want. You don't make clients do business with you in a way that's convenient for you; you make it convenient for them. So when I think about the writing center, my chief concern is just that—satisfying the customer.

I am grateful for the writing center research that has been done because a great deal of it is aimed directly at getting closer to the goal of customer satisfaction. I am more ambivalent, however, about the literature that models the writing center as a center of subversive activity, challenging the ethos of the university power structure. Adopting a business model does little or nothing, on the face of it, to challenge the status quo. In my defense I'd say that sooner or later students will be trying to make a mark for themselves in the world of the status quo, and we are remiss if we don't help them acquire skills they can use to their advantage, both now and later.

Like critics of the university, I also hope to empower students, and I believe the writing center is in a unique position to help them learn how to get what they want. I also believe that being in a college or university these days means they probably want a career with opportunities for advancement and corresponding levels of compensation for their efforts—if only to pay off their education loans. We can lament this state of affairs or—as one of my consultants has said—embrace it. It's no less an opportunity to make a difference for students.

Finally, customer satisfaction isn't just yielding to every wish of the customer. If that were the case, the writing center would simply write students' papers for them. Satisfaction is the result of conscious negotiation, and I can recommend two wise and thoughtful books on the subject. One is *The Tao of Sales*: *The Easy Way to Sell in Tough Times*, by E. Thomas Behr, Lao-Tzu Tao Te Ching, and Laozi Dao De Jing (Element, 1997), that articulates a view of vendor-client dynamics that is refreshingly unencumbered by the expectations that tend to block productive relationships. Also clarifying is *High Probability Selling: Re-Invents the Selling Process* by Jacques Werth and Nicholas Ruben (Bookworld, 1997).

Who's the client?

Something else that troubles me in the literature is the adversarial relationship some writing center professionals adopt toward faculty. Yes, there are some members of my faculty who have expectations of the Writing Center that don't square with mine, and they pose a challenge. However, I don't dismiss them or get into debates with them.

Faculty members are surely the center's clients as much as the students who walk through our doors. I don't forget that faculty are at the receiving end of the papers students write. Like the customer who receives direct mail or who walks by a rack of brochures at the bank or who sees a billboard, a faculty member is someone on the receiving end of a message intended to elicit a favorable response.

So for me, the best strategy for the writing center is to help students solve the problem of getting that favorable response—or, to use a phrase from business, to help students negotiate a win-win situation with their instructors. And in this regard, it helps to remember that the customer is always right.

Audience focus

My experience as a working writer makes a difference now in how I think about the teaching of writing. I'm often asking myself, "Which writing skills are going to be most valuable to students who in a few short years will be thrust into the world I just came from—the various corporate and organizational environments where they'll be expected, sooner or later, to write something?" On this point, from a marketing perspective, the answer is pretty easy—knowing and focusing on the audience.

I've learned that focus on audience is often an undeveloped and unfamiliar strategy for students in the writing process. Many seem unaware that closely reading an assignment or the instructor's comments on previous essays has much bearing on the paper they're trying to write now. Instead, students are usually focusing on something else—often an elusive ideal of the perfect essay or paper.

My consultants and I are sometimes drawn into situations where a student wants us to validate their belief that a paper deserves a better grade than it got from an instructor. On some absolute scale, they argue, sometimes tearfully, the paper more closely approaches an A and by giving it a C+ the instructor is being unfair and unreasonable. (The equivalent in a business environment is the "crazy boss" who nearly everyone ends up reporting to at one time or another.)

The opportunity for learning and empowerment is in students' willingness to focus on the instructor as a key variable in the problem immediately facing them. We often have to remind them that the measure of writing is situational and always audience driven. So we ask: What has been the instructor's feedback on your previous papers? What has your instructor been talking about in class? What has the instructor

assigned you to read? What does the instructor say in the assignment? What can we tell from all this about what the instructor wants?

If a student can't answer these questions and the instructor remains an unknown quantity, the fallback for consultants is to help the writer make the following assumptions:

- The reader is busy and probably easily distracted
- The reader doesn't have time or energy to figure out the point of a paper that's unclear
- The reader wants the paper to be interesting

When you consider what it's like as a teacher to read through a stack of papers, none of these assumptions should be surprising.

Student writers can also benefit from knowledge of a few other basic strategies that work with most audiences, such as:

- Think of the reader as someone who has to make a decision on the basis of what you've written
- Structure the paper as an argument with a thesis and supporting evidence
- Get to the point of the paper in the first paragraph
- State the point of each paragraph clearly in a topic sentence
- Write as though the reader is always prepared to disagree
- Use a clear, explanatory title
- Proofread and spell check

These also happen to be features of good business writing, where a long, disorganized, unfocused memo or report is almost certain to go unread.

One last word on this subject, however. The practices of standard business writing don't apply across the board. One exception is a kind of academic writing that is highly theoretical, analytical, and speculative—in other words, deliberately difficult. Here the purpose of the writer is to show evi-

dence of a heroic struggle with slippery concepts and abstractions and not to strive for clarity, which would diminish the complexity of the subject.

I confess, this kind of writing gives me a headache, but the challenge for us at the Writing Center is to help the student of the instructor who expects it. Finally, and I agree with Mort Sahl, who said this 40 years ago: you have to speak a language that people understand. When your audience wants a kind of writing that recognizes authentic thought only when it's represented by densely complex prose, you give them what they want.

Authorship

The concept of authorship is understood somewhat differently in the business world, where collaboration is often the norm. Documents prepared by teams can pass over so many desks and through so many rounds of revisions that it's nearly impossible finally to determine who wrote what. Writers in a corporate environment also learn to have their work reviewed by others before it gets to its intended audience. ("Can I run this by you?") A second or third pair of eyes typically generates needed changes.

The consultants at the writing center give students an experience of that kind of collaborative writing. By being interested and knowledgeable readers with feedback, they help reinforce an important lesson about written communication— a second opinion is better than just one's own.

The writing center consultant also performs another important role. As someone who is more familiar with the culture of the university, the consultant can mentor students in "how things are done here." This can help students begin to understand the absence of absolutes across organizational cultures, where tone, terminology, buzzwords, style, etiquette, and levels of formality are always relative—and mastery of them reflects credibility.

As an example of this, I can point to a significant difference of expectations between the corporate world and the academy, where educators prize critical thinking and the ability to closely analyze and find the weaknesses in any assumption, claim, or argument. By comparison, corporate culture tends to conflate critical thinking with being critical, that is, negative. In this world, enthusiasm and being positive are preferred. Problems are opportunities. The fiercely guarded independence of many academics doesn't tend to find a home in corporate culture where people are expected to be team players and surrender their individualism to a kind of groupthink. (That's not to say there's no groupthink among academics; it just takes different forms.)

The emphasis on audience permits consultants to raise student writers' awareness of both the expectations of the individual instructor and the university's own corporate culture. It can position critical thinking as one set of analytical and argumentative skills among many.

Process vs. product

There's a more critical point at which the academy and the business world part company, however, and I believe it leaves the writing center squarely in the middle. Whenever the literature addresses the writing center's position on proofreading, editing, and correctness, it reveals its ongoing struggle with this issue.

For twenty years, Stephen North's belief that we improve writers not writing has dominated our concept of the writing center's mission. While the business world would not deny that writing is a process, it would insist that the measure of the writer is in the final product. A poorly drafted document, with grammar, spelling and usage errors, is likely to be perceived as below standard and its author as lacking credibility.

In fact, this ideological fault line cuts right through the academy. Especially at a university like our own, with a large population of second language students, the writing center is frequently challenged on the issue of correctness by dismayed faculty whose students "can't write." Process theory advocates in the academy can insist that correctness is no predictor of good writing, but the complaints don't go away. Some may insist that these faculty should "learn how to read" papers that use nonstandard English. Not surprisingly, the complaints continue.

My experience as a working writer in the business world biases me, I suppose, but my belief is that the writing center must more aggressively address this issue. For many audiences, correctness matters. A lot. So when we devote tutoring sessions to helping students learn to proofread and edit their own writing, we're doing the right thing. Every workshop on grammar, mechanics, and usage is doing the right thing. These are not departures from the basic mission of the writing center—to empower writers. In fact, we need more such solutions.

So what does all this add up to? The writing center is in a key position not just between students and instructors. The worlds of business and the academy are linked by the students who pass through both of them. In what it has to offer student writers, a writing center helps to build a bridge between these two worlds.

The writing center occupies a place that opens onto the world beyond the academy, where students will communicate to organizational, corporate, and professional audiences they have yet to imagine. By modeling itself after similar agencies in the corporate world, the writing center can do much to help prepare students for these challenges, in whatever real world they happen to find themselves.

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The tutoring style decision tree: A useful heuristic for tutors

During training, new tutors at my center engage in what has become a fairly typical set of activities for most new tutors at most writing centers. Our tutors discuss among other things how to and when to use directive, non-directive and collaborative tutoring styles, how to establish rapport with a writer, how to help a writer discover his or her "real" needs and how to work together with a writer to evaluate his or her writing. Also, new tutors at my center read a fair amount of writing center literature including such favorites as Kenneth Bruffee's "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" Jeff Brook's "Minimalist Tutoring" and Muriel Harris's "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors. " Yet, despite this rich set of activities and readings, new tutors at my center still express a fair amount of unease about knowing when to use directive, non-directive and collaborative tutoring styles. It is an issue that we often re-address again and again when engaging in these various training activities.

In response to new tutors' concerns about how to decide when a tutoring style is appropriate, I have begun offering them a "Tutoring Style Decision Tree" (see illustration on page 6) at the start of their training as both a tutoring guide and as a context to consider when engaging in tutor training activities. The decision tree works by asking the tutor to consider the question: "To be empowered to write, what does the writer need to know?" The tree then uses this question as a means of both defining different tutoring styles and helping the tutor decide when to use these styles.

Using the previously mentioned guiding question, the tree defines directive tutoring as tutoring that is appropriate when the writer needs "objective" knowledge. The term "objective" is in quotes here because my use of the term is different from traditional uses of this term. By objective, I do not mean that there is a set of objective truths separate from the rich social contexts we all operate in. By objective, I mean knowledge that exists apart from the specific tutor and writer. For instance, whether Jane tutors Tom or Bill tutors Sarah, the format for typing a paper in proper MLA format as explained in the sixth edition of the *MLA Handboo*k does not change just because the tutors and writers change. Granted, the interpretation of these rules may change or the version of the handbook may change but the rules in the handbook exist apart from the particular writer and tutor.
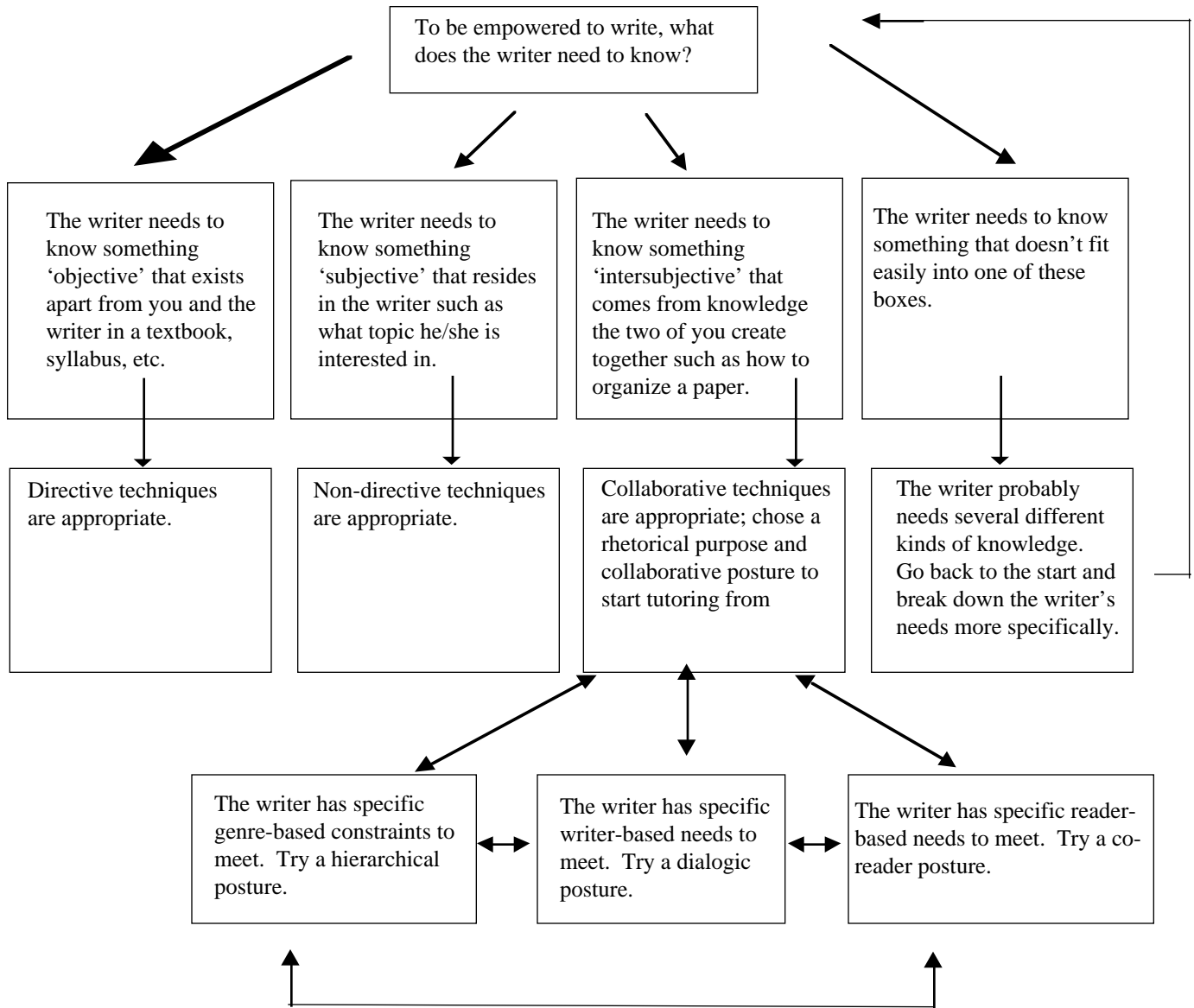
In contrast, the decision tree associates non-directive tutoring with "subjective" knowledge. Here again quotes denote that my specific use of the term is different from traditional uses of this term. By subjective, I mean the knowledge needed resides in the writer. For instance, only the writer can know what topic interests him or her. Only the writer can know what reaction he or she had to a reading he or she is being asked to write about. Only the writer owns any affective concerns he or she may bring to the tutoring session. Now, the writer may not know that he or she has this knowledge or these affective concerns. The tutor may have to help the writer discover this information through questions and other invention techniques. Also, I am not

arguing that the writer's interests and reactions exist outside social contexts or that those reactions and interests have not been shaped by said contexts. But what I am arguing is that subjective knowledge is knowledge that resides in the writer until it is articulated.

Finally, the tree defines collaborative tutoring as tutoring that is related to "intersubjective" knowledge. By intersubjective knowledge, I mean knowledge that does not already exist but knowledge that can and should be created through interaction between or among subjects. For instance, the writer may be unsure about how to organize a paper or about the best way to persuade the cafeteria to offer a better selection of vegetarian menu items. The answers to these questions do not exist fully apart from the writer or fully within the writer. The answers to these questions are dependent upon the writer's rhetorical context – a context that can only be responded to effectively by considering the impact of organizational or argumentative choices on the piece of writing, the writer and the audience. In other words, the answers to such questions must take into consideration all aspects of the act of communication. The inherently social nature of this activity and the knowledge associated with it makes it highly amenable to the kinds of writer-tutor interactions that collaborative tutoring can provide.

But as many of us know from the work of Andrea Lunsford, Harvey Kail and John Trimbur, and others, collaboration is not a monolithic term. The decision tree accounts for this fact by offering a range of "collaborative

Tutoring Style Decision Tree

To be empowered to write, what does the writer need to know?

The writer needs to know something 'objective' that exists apart from you and the writer in a textbook, syllabus, etc.	The writer needs to know something 'subjective' that resides in the writer such as what topic he/she is interested in.	The writer needs to know something 'intersubjective' that comes from knowledge the two of you create together such as how to organize a paper.	The writer needs to know something that doesn't fit easily into one of these boxes.

Directive techniques are appropriate.	Non-directive techniques are appropriate.	Collaborative techniques are appropriate; chose a rhetorical purpose and collaborative posture to start tutoring from	The writer probably needs several different kinds of knowledge. Go back to the start and break down the writer's needs more specifically.

The writer has specific genre-based constraints to meet. Try a hierarchical posture.	The writer has specific writer-based needs to meet. Try a dialogic posture.	The writer has specific reader-based needs to meet. Try a co-reader posture.

postures" a tutor can take by considering what kind of knowledge the writer needs. However, unlike directive and non-directive tutoring, the kind of knowledge needed cannot be identified by considering where it resides because this knowledge is yet to be created. Rather, the tutor and writer need to determine what rhetorical purpose the created knowledge will serve. There are at least three different kinds of rhetorical purposes the created

knowledge may have to serve: genre-based, writer-based and/or audience-based.

The decision tree relates a posture of hierarchical collaboration to knowledge generated to meet a genre-based need. By genre-based need, I mean that there is some text-based constraint that the knowledge generated must fulfill for it to be useful to the writer. For example, a common assignment at my in-

stitution is the "summary-response essay" which requires the writer to briefly summarize a text he or she has read and offer a response to said text. Often writers will come to the center for help because they are having difficulty writing either the summary or response portion of the essay. While there is not one "right way" to approach either of these writing tasks, the ideas the writer creates need to fulfill some specific guidelines. For instance,

the summary portion of the essay usually needs to portray as fairly and objectively as possible the thesis, purpose, and main ideas of the selected text. On the other hand, the response portion generally needs to offer the writer's well-focused and often personal response to the text. Since there are clear assignment guidelines that the writer needs to fulfill, the tutor may need to more actively guide the writer in creating material and evaluating its suitability for responding to the assignment's requirements.

In contrast, the decision tree links a dialogic posture to knowledge generated to meet a writer-based purpose. By a writer-based purpose, I mean a purpose that allows the piece of writing to meet some need the writer has. For instance, the writer may have a need for his or her values to be understood and respected by the audience. Here, the tutor may need to guide the writer in generating ideas that will meet this need, but since the need exists within the writer, it would not be appropriate for the tutor to offer the same level of direction he or she might offer when taking a hierarchical posture. Instead, the tutor will likely need to pose questions and use active listening to help the writer generate ideas.

The decision tree relates a posture of co-learner/reader to knowledge generated to meet an audience-based purpose. By an audience-based purpose, I mean that the writer needs to create knowledge that meets a need his or her audience has. For example, the audience may benefit from the writer's paper by gaining a new understanding or by being persuaded to take some action. In these instances, the tutor can best help the writer achieve these aims by playing the role of reader and allowing the writer to test the effects of his or her ideas by interacting with a "live" audience member.

A word of caution needs to be given about how the decision tree depicts these three rhetorical purposes and their related collaborative postures.

The tree's arrows are an attempt to demonstrate that these purposes are interrelated and recursive. What that means is that a tutor needs to be prepared to be flexible and switch collaborative postures often. For instance, if the writer is crafting a letter persuading the cafeteria manager to add more vegetarian items to the menu, he or she may have to create new knowledge that serves all three rhetorical purposes. In order to offer a convincing argument, the writer will have to meet the genre constraints related to argument, which usually involve the creation of reasons, evidence and persuasive appeals. Yet, the main points of the argument may also have to allow the writer to generate respect for his or her values as a vegetarian. If the writer hopes to be successful in persuading his or her audience to act, he or she will also have demonstrate an understanding of the constraints the audience faces in attempting to feed a large number of students in an economical fashion. To handle such a session effectively, the tutor will need to be prepared to adopt a variety of roles and collaborative postures.

As is apparent from the discussion so far, the tutoring style decision tree does not offer tutors specific strategies for tutoring as it presumes that these strategies are already being covered in other training activities. Instead, the decision tree focuses on how tutors can make good decisions about what tutoring style to use with a particular writer. This focus on decision making is exactly what makes the tree so valuable to new tutors. As the new tutors in my center read and learn about concrete tutoring strategies such as active listening and asking questions, they discuss how those strategies may relate to the various tutoring styles summarized in the decision tree. Through such discussions, the tutors discover interesting overlaps among the various tutoring styles and tutoring strategies. The tree helps new tutors better understand that the strategies they are learning about are highly flexible and adaptable.

Not only does the decision tree enhance new tutors' understanding of concrete tutoring strategies, but it also helps new tutors better understand much of the writing center literature that they read. Many of the readings we cover in the course emphasize important tutoring values such as collaboration and empowering the writer. Several of the readings also caution tutors not to "take over" the session by being "overly directive" and to beware of "dependent" writers who want the tutor to adopt a position of authority. The decision tree offers tutors another perspective for considering the values and scenarios offered in these readings as it helps new tutors realize that any tutoring style or strategy has the potential to be harmful if it is used in a way that violates the writer's needs and agency.

The decision tree described in this article offers new tutors an effective way to navigate the variety of readings, advice, activities and strategies they encounter in their early days of training. In addition, the decision tree's focus on guiding a tutor's decision making process rather than prescribing specific behaviors makes the tree a flexible tool that can continue to be relevant as the new tutor gains more experience. The decision tree's flexible nature also makes it a useful tool for promoting reflection. New and experienced tutors alike can use the tree to discuss how they have made tutoring style decisions in the past and what impact the tree might have on similar decisions in the future. By privileging writers' needs over specific tutoring styles, the decision tree reminds us all that tutoring happens best when we use what we know to make connections with one another.

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Call for Abstracts: Writing Centers and Disability

Abstracts (approximately 500 words) for potential contributions are invited for a new edited collection tentatively titled *Writing Centers and Disability*. This collection will investigate the vital, but often ignored intersection of writing center studies and disability studies.

Contributions will ultimately fall into three general categories:
- Research on tutoring writers with disabilities,
- Research and narratives of experience of making the writing center space accessible
- First-person accounts, both narrative and theoretical, of the experience of tutoring a disabled person or of being a disabled person who works in or uses a writing center.

We invite both writing center and disabilities studies scholars to participate, and we welcome informal inquiries. We encourage scholars from both fields to read and reference work from the other field.

We are especially interested in contributions focusing on disabilities that have not been written about extensively in writing center literature, such as blindness, mental illness, and conditions that limit mobility and stamina, especially those that may be perceived as invisible disabilities. We are also interested in the concept of passing.

Abstracts should be sent to Rebecca Day Babcock at r.s.day@iup.edu, Sharifa Daniels at sdaniels@sun.ac.za, James Inman at jamesainman@gmail.com, and Beth Rapp Young at byoung@mail.ucf.edu.

Please include full contact information with your abstract. Deadline: October 1, 2005

Ungrammatical Verse 2: Apostrophes

The fav'rite sign of poets in
a hurry to get through the line:
the owner's mark, contraction's tear,
the supple trace of what's not there.

But oh, ye gods of grammar, where
are they now, the flow'rs of yesteryear?

Absent
where they ought to be.
Present
where they don't belong.
Intransigently wrong.

Apostrophes
bring hardened readers
to their knee's
in prayer (begotten by dismay
upon despair):

Writers, please
don't use apostrophes
in plural noun's, possessive its'
or anywhere it give's us fits.

John Blazina
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TUTORS' COLUMN

Chemistry and the writing tutor

I was never good at chemistry. I was never good with the basic math skills chemistry requires, or with mathematical logic; I never took physics. Looking back, I believe I was in the Earl Warren Junior High School's version of special ed math. The only reason I could do algebra was because of the word problems, which were like stories to me, and for that reason, interesting. If a train leaves Point A going sixty miles per hour. . . . Oh, but I love trains, and I would want to think about who might be on it, and what might be the purpose of the journey—an escape, an assignation, a metaphor?

But chemistry, never. All I remember of chemistry is that the two sides were somehow supposed to mathematically match or otherwise be equal, and because of the aforementioned deficiencies, my chemical equations lacked a certain quantitative consonance. So when the Director of the Student Center of Academic Achievement at California State University, Hayward, Dr. Emily Nye, asked all tutors to write about a series of questions, one being what is the chemistry that takes place between a tutor and tutee, I was glad she had e-mailed it. I was at home when I read it, and Dr. Nye was unable to hear my groan.

Chemistry and the writing tutor? But after I'd thought of it, I realized chemistry plays a part in everything from food to information processing to emotion (Ornstein and Thompson 83), as interlaced as axons to dendrites and no less true of tutoring. What can you say about a tutor whose most effective sessions center around food? Maybe that her chemistry of choice is food chemistry.

There was the Korean student who could not understand Sydney J. Harris' sausage-casing vs. oyster pearl metaphor of educational philosophy (2-3). The student's assignment was to argue Harris's metaphor as to whether the purpose of education is to stuff students with information as if they were sausage casings or to open them like oysters to discover the pearls of wisdom already within. The difficulty was this student had never seen a sausage, and the best he could glean from the dictionary was that sausage was a bag of some sort. Happily, my love of food came to the rescue. "Instead of sausage," I said, "would mandu work?" I opened my palm and mimed filling a mandu skin with beef and chopped mushrooms and scallions. I folded it over and pretended to crimp the edges. He was delighted. "How do you know mandu?" he asked. I smiled contentedly. But the student understood, and his synapses fired up hot enough to saute mandu, though I personally prefer mandu guk.

Then there was the Vietnamese student who did not understand the expression "it all boiled down to one thing" from an article to be used in a timed writing proficiency test. She was a thorough, careful student, and her article was peppered with notes and highlighted words she had looked up. But she could not decipher the idiomatic expressions, and after a brief discussion of "watchdog" which was not a dog wearing a watch, she turned to me and said, "What is this 'boiled down to one thing?'" Naturally, we talked about Vietnamese red chile sauce. It begins with a pot of water and the following ingredients: chiles,

sugar, garlic, salt, vinegar. With the water level high, near the top of the pot, and here I provided another helpful pantomime, it all boils on the stove. And in the end, at the bottom of the pot, the different ingredients had boiled down to one thing: red chile sauce. The student was able to relate the expression to the article with no problem, hence, more synapse firing. More chemistry, in this case, electrochemical impulses conducted by dendrites to axons (Restak 8), so the tutee could store and analyze new information.

And this process works both ways. My synapses get fired up, too, when I learn interesting information. For instance, I just learned from a student's paper that a freak factory accident gave John Muir the push he needed to pursue a new career as a conservationist. I became pretty fired up by an African international student's paper on medical research and race politics. For her nursing master's class, she revealed how little attempt was made in America to eradicate the bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatown in the early 20th century; instead, Chinese Americans were castigated for the plague outbreak and quarantined. She argued that not many years later, scientists were feverishly researching and creating monolithic foundations in the name of the white middle class disease: polio.

Through other tutees, I have learned of the life and death struggles of certain algae-eaters; I have learned that the GI Joe doll's musculature has increased over the past several years at a rate child psychologists find alarming; I have read arguments that definitive studies have shown no ill effects of gay and lesbian

adoption; I have read about the origins of Islamic dress as a liberator of women. By now, I have read many summaries and analyses of the philosopher Hobbes, and while I still do not understand his work, I have been moved by a comparison of Hobbes' writing with a student's witness of his father's execution.

It is not possible to separate emotion from this kind of writing or from the tutor-tutee connection any more than we could separate emotion from chemistry (Astonishing Brain). We cannot say, "Oh, there is the exact point where serotonin has accelerated the tutor's heartbeat or the chemical dopamine has brought a smile to the tutee's face." But the chemistry is there when a student brushes my hand while making a correction or maintains eye contact a little longer than necessary or offers a nod of understanding. There was an emotional connection when a tutee, on a hot, stuffy afternoon, brought me a fruit drink. It's there in the look of concern of a particular tutee who, knowing our hectic schedule, always asks: "Do you need to take a break before we begin?" He was seeking a balance between my well-being and his need to analyze his essay.

This balance, this connection has been present in my most rewarding tutor-tutee relationships. One student, a nineteen-year-old, brought me a book she'd read on the plane, *Tuesdays with Morrie,* translated into Korean because she knew I was studying Korean. At the time, I thought it was a sweet gift but now as I write, I wonder about the significance. Is it significant that the age differential between my tutee and myself is roughly the same as that between Mitch and Morrie or that my weekly sessions with this tutee take place on Tuesdays? I tried to translate those simple words, "Tuesdays with Morrie," into Korean and my attempt looked nothing like the official Korean translation. When I translated, I used the plural marker for Tuesday as in more than one, but this was incorrect. Plural in Korean is subtle and discretionary. In English, plural is not subtle; it must be accounted for, and this is something I work on with this tutee. "Is this more than one?" I ask, pointing to a word: apple, student, mountain, or anything that can be counted. Later I learned that in Korean, Tuesday is noncountable.

This student, and others, have asked if I am a teacher as if to imply they would sign up for a class if they could. Teaching has nothing on tutoring—all right, one thing: salary—but I think few teachers could look out on a classroom and know they commanded the rapt attention of virtually every student, or that every student, upon leaving his or her seat, offers sincere thanks. Some students shake my hand earnestly as they leave; occasionally a student will bow.

It is more than I deserve because to a person, my tutees are modest. They think I have wrought some sort of chemically-induced academic alchemy on their efforts, turned sheets of paper into leaves of gold, when in fact I have only nudged them to do their own work. Or at least this is what I have managed to do in the most successful sessions. And while I know I am not as good as they think I am, I sometimes allow the chemicals, the serotonin and dopamine, to course and snap and fire all along my internal pathways before I pause and say, "No, it was you." Or maybe it was us, and the chemical equation, when complete, is a narrative of the balance that has occurred between two parts.

Deb Atwood
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Hayward, CA

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Writing Across the Curriculum

Call for Proposals
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Howard Tinberg, Writing Lab Director, wins the 2004 Outstanding Community College Professor of the Year award

(Reprinted below are excerpts from an article from the *Boston Globe*, May 22, 2005, by Katie Oliveri)

Howard Tinberg admits that when he first started teaching, he didn't listen to his students as well as he should have. But now, the Bristol Community College professor lectures less and listens more, urging his students to take part in their own learning. An English professor, Tinberg won the 2004 Outstanding Community College Professor of the Year from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Tinberg has taught English at Bristol in Fall River, MA since 1987. He teaches composition and British literature and has created a course on the Holocaust in literature and history. He has been director of the college's writing lab since 1993.

As one of his teaching techniques, Tinberg sends students into their community to research their interests. What students bring to the table: "While I once saw students as passive recipients of the knowledge that I would transfer to them, I now regard students as active agents in their own learning — indeed, as researchers themselves, fully capable, if given the opportunity, to make new knowledge and to achieve expertise. . . . They are not empty vessels. They come with a range of experience that can be useful in the classroom."

What teachers need to learn: "The challenge for faculty over the long haul is to remain students, to remind themselves to be intellectually active and step out of their own environments as teachers." A common misunderstanding about community college professors: That "we really don't or can't engage in research and keep up as scholars in our field. . . . We can be really sound scholars and really good researchers."

On his favorite class: "I studied British literature in graduate school, so teaching it brings me back to that point in my career, but my professional identification is in composition. . . . Since I'm the child of Holocaust survivors, I also have a personal connection with the Holocaust course I teach."

The plus of a writing center: "It's hard to focus on individuals in the classroom. The writing lab specializes in a one-on-one teaching moment and, in my case, I get to tutor students over some time and assist some students on their portfolios."

On tutoring: "It's a developmental process and some take longer than others. I'm working with a student now who is writing a paper on the benefits of video games but his paper wasn't structured to highlight his knowledge effectively. . . . He isn't putting in new information but rearranging material so that it highlights his research. He's getting there."

Call for submissions to *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal is an online publication that represents the collaboration of writing center consultants and directors across the nation. We invite article submissions for our upcoming issues. The theme for the spring 2006 issue is "Writing Centers Outside the Humanities"; the deadline isNovember 7, 2005. In addition to pieces on these themes, we invite short article submissions on other writing center-related topics from consultants and administrators. *Praxis* is a project of the University of Texas Undergraduate Writing Center.

View the complete call for articles and submissions guidelines at: <http://uwc3.fac.utexas.edu:8000/%7Epraxis/AboutUs/Static/Submissions>.

Also check out the spring issue of *Praxis* at <http://uwc3.fac.utexas.edu:8000/%7Epraxis>. In that issue, we explored technology in the writing center. The fall 2005 issue focuses on the theme "Whom We Serve."

Book Review

Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes. by Beth L. Hewett and
Christa Ehmann NCTE: Urbana, IL 2004.
(ISBN: 0814136656; 203 pp., paper, $35.95. Order from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801)

Reviewed by Christopher Ervin, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD

I must admit, when I opened Beth L. Hewett and Christa Ehmann's *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction* and read on the permission acknowledgements page that all of the figures and example consultations are borrowed from Smarthinking, Inc., I hesitated. When I further read that "[p]ortions of this book are based on Smarthinking's *Orientation Guide for Writing Instructors*, originally developed by the authors for Smarthinking, Inc." (ix), I stopped short. "What is this," I asked myself, "a 200-page long NCTE endorsement for Smarthinking, Inc.?" A writing center director myself, I am sensitive to the trend in out-sourcing supplemental writing instruction, and to have in my hands a book that looked as if it were written by online writing instructor trainers *for* online writing instructor trainers but to learn that it was written by two employees of Smarthinking, Inc. turned my world upside down . . . but only momentarily. Hewett and Ehmann's guide for online writing instructor training, regardless of my sensitivity to the problems of outsourcing, outlines a thoughtful approach to preparing teachers and tutors for online writing instruction. Their pedagogy is grounded not only in current rhetoric and composition theory, which they establish in chapter 2, "Theoretical Perspectives for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)," but also in what they term "e-learning" theory. In other words, Hewett and Ehmann steer clear of a common misconception I see in much current thinking about online writing instruction, namely that it mimics (or *should* mimic) what happens in "real" classrooms and writing centers, that the goals for face-to-face teachers and tutors and online teachers and tutors should mirror one another. Hewett and Ehmann, however, recognize from the beginning of *Preparing Educators* that "there is something fundamentally different about teaching and learning in the virtual medium" (xiii), and their approach to training online instructors embraces rather than resists this difference, both theoretically and pedagogically.

Divided into two sections, "Part I: Online Writing Instruction Program Development" and "Part II: Principle-Centered Online Training in Asynchronous and Synchronous Environments," *Preparing Educators* provides sufficient background and theory for beginning online instructors and instructor-trainers and includes specific techniques and activities for preparing online educators.

Part I consists of two foundational chapters. Chapter one, "The Online Training Spiral," discusses five pedagogical principles upon which Hewett and Ehmann build their training program: investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection. *Investigation* involves collecting a variety of quantitative and qualitative data about the training process, "thereby advancing knowledge that can be poured into improved iterations of the training program" (6). Hewett and Ehmann further demonstrate their commitment to sound online instruction training, insisting that online instructors be *immersed* in the online teaching/learning environment as they train to work with students in that environment. In other words, training for online instruction, they insist, must occur online. Third, Hewett and Ehmann value *individualization* in online instructor training programs, something that software-based training modules are unable to offer. Fourth, online training must draw on *association* among trainees, which is, in short, human-interaction (albeit computer-mediated human interaction) that creates a support network for online instructors. Finally, Hewett and Ehmann urge those who plan on establishing online training programs to build into their programs the opportunity for *reflection* through evaluation and professional development. They argue that evaluation should be viewed by both new online instructors and those preparing them to teach/tutor online as an opportunity for ongoing critical self-reflection.

The second chapter, "Theoretical Perspectives for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)," surveys current relevant scholarship in composition studies, specifically collaborative learning and social constructivist theory. For the purposes of this review, I think it important to note here that chapter two is the point in the book in which *Preparing Educators* begins to show clear signs of an identity crisis. At the beginning of the chapter, the authors admit that the book has been written for two distinct audiences: online instructors and online writing program directors. They write, "[A]lthough individual *instructors* may not have a desire nor perceive a need to be intimately familiar with OWI's theoretical underpinnings, we recommend that *program directors* critically examine this material

with an eye toward furthering the collective understanding of OWI's impact on teaching and learning" (31, emphasis in original).

Part Two of *Preparing Educators* continues in this same vein. The synopsis of chapter three, "Online Writing Instruction in Asynchronous Environments," highlights the book's identity crisis:

> This chapter focuses on (1) specific approaches for teaching and instruction in the asynchronous modality and (2) methods for training instructors for this modality. . . . Finally, this chapter is designed to provide program directors, trainers, and trainees with concrete ways to move forward in the development of their own programs. (67)

Including information for two distinct audiences is, by itself, not a bad idea. Most writing center directors I know use texts like *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice* with undergraduates, but they also find scholarship in the collection that is included primarily for directors. *Preparing Educators*, however, is a difficult read due in large part to its failure to speak directly to one audience (online instructors) or the other (online program directors/trainers).

For instance, at the beginning of chapter five, "Online Instruction in Synchronous Environments," Hewett and Ehmann explain the chapter's structure:

> As in Chapter 3, we weave recommendations about specific training methods for new online instructors into this chapter. Each section is written with trainees as the primary audience. However, at the start of each section, we provide "advice for trainers" that demonstrates how to apply the principles of investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection. This commentary is designed to help inform the development of your own online training programs. (115)

Hewett and Ehmann *do* provide "advice for trainers" at the beginning of each section in chapters three and five, with the primary audience being trainees. Isn't *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction*, however, supposed to target *trainers*? Furthermore, the two chapters that offer practical training modules for asynchronous and synchronous instruction,

chapters four and six, respectively, are written with the trainer/program director as the primary audience. In other words, we have a book whose title speaks to program directors that includes a chapter that trainees might not need and subsequent chapters that are written with trainees as the targeted audience but with "advice for trainers" sections interspersed throughout the chapter. Confused? Wait until you read the book.

All is not lost, though, in *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction*. Program directors will find sound advice in Part Two for devising specific training activities for new and continuing online instructors, and Hewett and Ehmann's approach to online instruction draws directly from current composition, rhetoric, and "e-learning" theory. However, this is *not* a book I would recommend assigning to online instructors as part of a training program even though sections of it were written with those instructors in mind. Rather, I would suggest the program director, when preparing materials for an online writing instruction training program, utilize Hewett and Ehmann's extensive references and assign readings written specifically for online instructors.

Reviewed by Candace Stewart, Ohio University, Athens, OH

This is a text that is way in over its own head. By that I mean that the writers of the text make enormous and universal claims about what the book can do, and in making those claims they lay themselves wide open for intense critique—theoretically, pedagogically, philosophically, disciplinarily, and practically. My issues with this text began in the introduction when the authors assert that the five pedagogical practices (investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection) they will use as their framework for online training are "commonly accepted" (xi). As a one-time secondary

English educator, and a long-time college English educator, I found that assertion interesting, and though I find no fault with these pedagogical principles as principles, I did wonder where and when and how they found this package of principles "commonly accepted"; whose work were they drawing on? Imagine my surprise when reading a note at the end of the introduction that these five principles were a packaged framework that the authors themselves had put together:

> [I]n our practice together we witnessed certain core principles emerge regarding training teachers for online contexts. These prin-

ciples—investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection—have remained firm despite shifting technology, working with teachers of differing backgrounds and goals, and our developing understanding of OWI [online writing instruction]. (xviii)

Again, I have no problem with the principles; what I do have problems with is the rhetorical strategy of promoting one's own package of principles as something the educational community already knows and accepts. Unfortunately, Hewett and Ehmann's textual and rhetorical decisions, like

this one, means that we need to read this manual with our analytical, rhetorical, pedagogical, and theoretical lenses at high alert.

Let's begin with rhetorical slippage. One of the five pedagogical terms is "reflection," which sounds very useful for a training guide. And, in the section on reflection, the writers note that "Teachers and trainers widely agree that a key component of any training program involves the critically reflective process of examining notions about teaching and learning in light of one's actual experiences" (20). However, by the end of that first paragraph, the writers say: "In this section, we will discuss how evaluation and professional development are processes of this final principle [reflection]" (21). Suddenly reflection gets turned upside down, no longer working for the person doing the reflection, but tied only to evaluative issues; reflection has become simply a code word for assessment and evaluation. The writers "emphasize . . . that when evaluation, or assessment, is approached as an opportunity for critical reflection, it can become a way for trainees to participate in an ongoing discussion about the nature of online teaching and learning with the ultimate aim of improving practice" (21), which, in turn, emphasizes reflection reductively, merely as an assessment tool.

Given this reductive framework, it's not surprising that the text's two keywords are *efficiency* and *efficacy*. These terms appear frequently in relation to both training and actual teaching, as well as with the writers' concern with rescuing current-traditional pedagogies of correctness. The writers

reiterate that the guide is both principle-centered and problem-centered, which leads them, theoretically, to make some interesting (and problematic) assertions about current pedagogical theories and practices. Thus, the writers' review of the last 20 years or so of composition's pedagogical options leads them towards establishing that most teachers use a blend of all of our known pedagogies. The writers use their own experiences in online training to claim that "even practitioners and institutions whose stated guiding principles point explicitly to social theory probably practice a more implicitly eclectic approach to addressing the writers needs" (54). But what the writers call a "probable practice" of "eclectic" pedagogies at unnamed institutions elides the philosophical and cognitive underpinnings and implications/consequences of these pedagogies. They seem to not know (or care?) that pedagogies embrace and represent a whole philosophical approach—definitions, meanings, and functions of the human, of language, of education, and of the writer's relationship to others (language, technologies of writing, self, audiences, meanings). Thus they move quickly and easily from the "probable practice" theory to an emphasis on and a recovery of "more directive teaching methods," the ones that "most likely derive from a problem-centered approach to the student writing that we find invaluable in OWI" (56).

Hewett and Ehmann build their argument for product-centered pedagogies by asserting that current-traditional pedagogies "still thrive in certain developmental writing and test preparation courses, some FYE courses, text-

books (particularly those for underprepared students), and writing centers, including OWLS," since OWLS often provide "sentence-level instructional handouts . . . understood as a current-traditional approach to teaching [as] these handouts are developed outside the context of an individual's writing and attend primarily to issues of correctness" (55). From there the writers make the claim that since "such exercises prove to be popular and useful to many students and, given that value, we think they should not be disdained" (55), and they end up asserting that current writing theories that argue against proofreading and editing students' papers "may not be in the online student's best interest" (56).

These problems are fundamental drawbacks to this project, and, in fact, make it almost impossible to want to use some of their seemingly effective and often clearly-articulated training components and exercises. My major question is: if we want to really find ways to use online technologies for teaching writing, shouldn't we want to find ways that don't involve returning to pedagogies that we know are mostly ineffective for teaching *writing* (though not for teaching a kind of *correctness*)? Because if this particular technologically-invested "train . . . has left the station and is roaring down the tracks" (xv) without a full complement of critical knowledge about the historical, cultural, philosophical, and ideological underpinnings of our pedagogies, then simple transfer of f2f to disembodied interactions may not be in any of our best interests.

Reviewed by Nita Danko, Purdue University Calumet, Hammond, IN

As the business of online writing instruction grows, those of us in search of ways to unify technology and composition look to the more experienced to lead the way. Therefore, I was de-

lighted to find in their book entitled *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction* that both Beth L. Hewett and Christa Ehmann have not only worked in the field of online com-

position but also work for Smartthinking, Inc. I felt that this book would help me to become an online writing instructor. However, I quickly discovered that *Preparing Educators*

was a "how to develop a training course" book rather than the "how to teach writing online" book I was looking for.

I needed to find a perspective from which to read this book. Since I train tutors for synchronous tutorials and have been an asynchronous tutor, I thought the book would help enhance my current training program. However, upon reading the initial pages of the book, I realized my online tutor trainer perspective would be challenged. The first red flag for me was the second sentence in the second paragraph on page xi: "Considering the infusion of rapidly changing technology in higher education, readers who train professional teachers, graduate teaching assistants, and advanced undergraduate tutors for online writing instructional contexts . . . should find this book useful." While Hewett and Ehmann clearly indicate that their book is meant to prepare online writing instructors, it is problematic to include online writing tutors with online writing instructors. Tutors are not instructors and should not be considered instructors. Setting that aside, Hewett and Ehmann have without a doubt invited the online tutor trainer into their book, so I continued to read carefully searching for ways to improve my training program.

As I continued through the book, I found the readability cumbersome. This was my second red flag. The review of literature read like chunks of a dissertation and had little if any discussion of writing centers or tutors. This forced me to read from a different perspective. I then began to read from the perspective of an instructor who incorporates Blackboard into a face-to-face composition course. However, I was jolted back to reading from the perspective of the online tutor trainer by page 52 where Hewett and Ehmann fail to transition between online teaching and online tutoring. In this section of the book, Hewett and Ehmann bemoan that "[Cooper, Bui and Riker] seem to assume that particular principles of face-to-face tutoring *should be* replicated in the online environment, when, in fact, students and instructors may not be best served by directly comparing online instruction to traditional face-to-face instruction" (52). In fact, Hewett and Ehmann accuse Cooper, Bui, and Riker of sending mixed messages, yet by the end of the paragraph Hewett and Ehmann themselves send a mixed message by beginning the sentence with online tutoring and ending with online instructing. Red flag number one is now flying with red flag number two: the attempt to force together conflicting research resulted in a lack of word flow, severely impeding readability. I often found myself forced to change perspectives, making this book a difficult read.

My most significant troubles as a reader of *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction* can be found in Chapters 3-6. Hewett and Ehmann appear to use these chapters to provide instruction and specific examples for program directors developing an online composition training program. However, my confusion caused by forcing research together is heightened by the attempt to use certain vocabulary synonymously. For example, instructors/consultants/tutors are often used synonymously. Also used synonymously are sessions/conferences/instruction. Additionally, the authors discuss a "problem-based approach that starts the instructional interaction," and use Peter North's "Training Tutors to Talk about Writing" as support. On page 74 they provide guiding questions for online instructors that are frequently used in a tutorial session. By page 76, they group tutors and instructors together when they recommend "assessing what the student writer has articulated as the assignment's intent and the areas the student wants to address in the conference." As an online asynchronous or synchronous tutor, I realize the importance of this information, but as an online instructor, I believe I should already know this information because I assigned the writing.

Chapter 6 was the most confusing chapter, requiring me to read from far too many perspectives. Hewett and Ehmann provide examples of responses from the online writing instructor to the student writer, but there doesn't seem to be a teacher/student relationship. Rather, the examples of responses appear to be between a tutor and a writer during a synchronous online tutorial. Adding to the lack of readability caused by having to read from so many perspectives, Hewett and Ehmann briefly and casually include ESOL writers (123), claiming that the major goal of the synchronous OWI is to keep the "student actively engaged in the session" (126), and provide examples of training chat not synchronous writing instruction chat or synchronous tutorial chat (127).

Hewett and Ehmann's attempt to include online tutoring in their book fails for me. From the many perspectives it took for me to read *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction*, I was confused and discouraged as both an online tutor and a trainer of online tutors. I am perplexed by the need to include online tutoring in the book, and am unenthusiastic to see synchronous and asynchronous writing center research used in a way that muddies the very clear practices and methodologies forged by writing center researchers. I believe there is much to be learned about online writing instruction and online tutoring by blending the research from both. However, the attempt to blend the research in this text causes confusion, because too many perspectives are required in order to read the text. From my perspective, Hewett and Ehmann's *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction* would better serve their intended audience with a more appropriate title, such as *How to Develop a Training Program for Online Writing Instructors,* and by avoiding the pairing of online writing instruction and online tutoring.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 19-23, 2005: International Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN.
Contact: Frankie Condon e-mail: fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu. Conference Web site: <http://writingcenters.org/2005/index.html>.

February 16-18, 2006: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Chapel Hill, NC.
Contact: Kim Abels kabels@email.unc.edu and Vicki Russell vgr@duke.edu. Conference Web site: <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/swca/>.

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