

*the* **WAC** *Journal*

**Volume 14 • 2003**  
**Writing Across the Curriculum**

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# **The WAC Journal**

**Volume 14**

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**Submissions:** We welcome inquiries, proposals, and 5-15 page double-spaced manuscripts on WAC-related topics, such as WAC and Faculty Development, WAC Techniques and Applications, WAC Program Strategies, WAC and WID, WAC and Writing Centers, Interviews, and Reviews. Proposals and articles outside these categories will also be considered.

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## Editor's Introduction

This issue opens with an interview of a nationally-recognized WAC personality. Carol Rutz has written up a delightful and insightful interview of John Bean, the author of *Engaging Ideas*. Interviews of this type are a feature we plan to include on a regular basis in future issues of *The WAC Journal*.

WAC techniques generally involve writing to learn and are often easy to adapt to various disciplines. Lynne Ticke offers a WAC technique that could be used across the curriculum, a way for teachers to open a dialogue with their students about the comments they have made on student papers. These dialogues, as Ticke explains, result in opportunities for substantial learning for both the teacher and the students involved.

Writing in the disciplines is a component of WAC that sheds light on not only how language is used in different disciplines, but also how language is used differently within a particular discipline. Tatyana Flesher demonstrates how writing to learn can be applied to a mathematics course to facilitate a professor's knowledge of which concepts students understand and which concepts they do not yet grasp. Kate Chanock offers a framework for students to analyze varieties of writing in any discipline, an analysis that will help students make better language choices when they write.

One of the glories of a WAC approach is the stimulating faculty development that frequently accompanies it. Karen McComas and Charles Lloyd explain a teaching portfolio program that is used on their campus to certify professors who want to teach writing intensive courses. Creating these portfolios encourages reflection and professional growth.

Just as WAC is exceptionally diverse, so are the strategies used to sustain and improve WAC programs. John Pennington and Robert Boyer explain one strategy, a conceptual approach, and make the case for situating WAC as a moral and civic duty. Ellen M. Millsaps describes a very different strategy, one in which faculty come together and collaborate to create a college-wide writing guide.

Finally, Jacob S Blumner reviews two recently published books, *WAC for the New Millenium* and *The WAC Casebook*. These books, which are useful in sustaining WAC programs, both suggest and will likely influence where WAC is heading in the future.

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# The WAC Journal

Volume 14, August 2003

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## Contents

### Interview

- Up Close and Personal with a WAC Pioneer: John Bean 7  
**Carol Rutz**

### WAC Techniques and Applications

- Opening Dialogue: Students Respond to Teacher  
Comments in a Psychology Classroom 19  
**Lynne Ticke**

### WAC and WID

- Writing to Learn in Mathematics 37  
**Tatyana Flesher**
- A Framework for Analyzing Varieties of Writing  
in a Discipline 49  
**Kate Chanock**

---

## **WAC and Faculty Development**

Reflection as Tension and Voice in Teaching Portfolios 67  
**Karen McComas, Charles Lloyd**

## **WAC Program Strategies**

A Reflective Strategy for Writing Across the Curriculum:  
Situating WAC as a Moral and Civic Duty 87  
**John Pennington, Robert Boyer**

Faculty Interdisciplinary Collaboration on a College-Wide  
Writing Guide 101  
**Ellen M. Millsaps**

## **Review**

Where WAC is Heading 119  
by **Jacob S Blumner**

**Notes on Contributors** 124

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# Interview

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# Up Close and Personal with a WAC Pioneer: John Bean

*Carol Rutz, Carleton College*

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Reputation speaks volumes, and when it comes to a towering reputation in WAC, John Bean stands as an icon. He would also hate every word in the preceding sentence, for John Bean, Professor of English and Consulting Professor in Academic and Professional Writing at Seattle University, sees himself as just a hard-working college professor and textbook author. Period. John's modesty is as genuine as his contribution to higher education. Author of many articles in literature as well as composition and rhetoric, he is well known for his textbooks, *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings* (Longman, with John D. Ramage and June Johnson, 6<sup>th</sup> edition in press), *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition., Longman, 2003, with John D. Ramage and June Johnson), and *Reading Rhetorically: A Reader for Writers* (Longman, 2002, with Virginia A. Chappell and Alice M. Gillam). But the scholarly work that brings his name immediately to mind is *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 1996). This book, which speaks to faculty new and old, offers solid, accessible advice on ways to consolidate the teaching-learning relationship in the college classroom.

Based on the success of *Engaging Ideas*, John is in great demand as a consultant and workshop leader. With about eighteen months advance notice, I invited John to come to my small, liberal arts college in December 2002 for a three-day workshop on writing in the major, and he was able to fit us into his sched-



ule. Carleton has had a WAC philosophy since the mid-1970s, and our faculty are quite experienced with writing as a pedagogy. Nevertheless, John captivated 27 of us for three full days. Months later, faculty still credit insights from that workshop for informing their teaching in subsequent courses—not to mention solving problems in their own professional writing.

At the 2003 CCCC meeting in New York, I invited John to sit down with me and talk about how he became a WAC guru. He graciously consented (while wincing at the “guru” label); the resulting dialogue represents a distillation of two conversations and extensive correspondence. Acting out his own pedagogy, he used questions I submitted in advance as exploratory “thinking pieces” to prepare him for the interview. The exchange not only produced thoughtful answers to my questions but demonstrated once again that the WAC strategies John Bean teaches in his books and workshops apply beautifully to situations outside of the classroom.

\* \* \*

*C.R. My first question derives directly from something you told me when you were on my campus: You describe yourself as a WAC person who got into WAC before it existed. Could you explain how a nice Spenserian scholar found his way from a literary specialty to this area of pedagogy?*

J.C.B. I was teaching at a small, Catholic liberal arts college in Montana—the College of Great Falls—where there were only four persons in the English Department. Most of my friends came from other disciplines. My friends assigned writing in their courses but admitted to me, almost embarrassed, that they didn’t know the proper technical terms to really “correct” student writing. In 1977 the Lilly Endowment announced a competitive grant program to strengthen communications curricula in liberal arts colleges. I decided to try my hand at grant writing. The exter-

nal evaluator who flew into Great Falls to size us up was Ed White. I later learned that Ed was becoming nationally prominent for his work in writing assessment. I am forever grateful to Ed for changing the direction of my career. He must have bit his lip on several occasions because my main vision for conducting workshops was to teach faculty how to use the correction symbols at the back of the *Harbrace College Handbook*. I was doing “grammar across the curriculum.” I didn’t have a clue about the revolution occurring in composition studies—what Maxine Hairston was to call the “paradigm shift” from current-traditional to process pedagogies. In 1978 we brought Harvey Wiener to spend the summer with us at the College of Great Falls as a consultant and workshop leader. Harvey told me about Elaine Maimon at Beaver College and helped cement my new interest in composition studies. I also discovered with my College of Great Falls colleagues that our real interest was not in grammar and correctness but in exploring deeper problems of how students learned to pose questions, think, compose, and make arguments.

In 1979 I took a new job at Montana State University, where the composition program immersed me in a supportive environment of extraordinarily talented adjunct faculty and a variety of colleagues from across the disciplines interested in the new writing-across-the-curriculum movement. My colleagues Dean Drenk, John Ramage, Jack Folsom, and I planned and co-directed the Montana State University Thinking Skills and Writing Project, funded by FIPSE. By the early 1980s, I found composition studies to be an engaging intellectual enterprise combining theory, nuts-and-bolts classroom instruction, and a love of students. In 1980 or 1981, I think, I quit subscribing to *PMLA* and began reading—cover-to-cover in those early days—both *College English* and *CCC*.

*C.R. One of the criticisms of WAC holds that it is difficult to sustain in a given institution over time, given variables of cur-*

*riculum and personnel. Have you observed a “WAC cycle” as you have taught and consulted in various institutions? If so, how would you describe it? If not, how would you answer claims that WAC—if not a cyclical phenomenon—rides sort of a sine curve in many institutions?*

J.C.B. The sine curve is a good metaphor if an observer wants to focus directly on visible WAC programs. But, to be honest, I sometimes don't know how I would define a WAC program or know for sure whether one actually exists. Institutions without any WAC program by name might still have many dedicated faculty across the disciplines assigning writing in WAC-savvy ways. Conversely, an institution with a very visible W-course program might isolate campus writing into W-courses only. But there is no question that a dynamic faculty leader can generate widespread campus involvement in WAC activities. On my own campus, where we have no WAC program by name but encourage writing in every course, interest in WAC has been stimulated by the assessment movement. By the assessment movement, I don't mean writing assessment—such as the ground-breaking compositional work of Ed White, Brian Huot, Kathi Yancey, Michael Neal, Bill Condon, Bob Broad, Rich Haswell, and many others (including your own work with portfolio assessment at Carleton). I mean rather the work of persons who often identify professionally with AAHE or POD, who focus on student learning, and often seem unaware of composition or WAC research. For example, an influential book on our campus is Mary E. Huba's and Jann E. Freed's *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning* (Allyn & Bacon, 2000). This book has excellent chapters on course design, writing assignments (which they call “assessment tasks”), rubrics, and portfolios, all largely in harmony with our own practices in WAC. But its bibliography includes almost no work from WAC or composition scholars. It's as if two parallel discourses are proceeding side by side toward the same goals

without overlap. My point, then, is that WAC might be happening without being visible as a program.

*C.R. Could you elaborate a bit more on what you mean by the way assessment has stimulated WAC on your campus? On many campuses, assessment is the kind of word that can clear a room.*

J.C.B. To me, assessment goes wrong when it focuses too much on statistics-driven accountability for accreditation instead of on local, faculty-owned research aimed at improving student learning. The work of Barbara Walvoord and Virginia Anderson in *Effective Grading* focuses on this kind of course-embedded assessment that promotes curricular change. The best assessment research occurs when departmental faculty discover something like, “Wow, about half the students in this chemistry lab don’t know the difference between the Results and the Discussion section of an experimental report.” By identifying typical problems in student performance, faculty can often discover ways to improve curricula or instruction.

Let me give you an actual example. The Department of Finance at Seattle University wanted to assess students’ critical thinking in a senior-level finance course. They developed a case assignment asking students to propose a best solution to an open-ended finance problem occasioned by a hypothetical client’s particular investment dilemma. Students were to write memos addressed to a lay client supporting their solutions with reasons, evidence, and appropriate graphics. All seven members of the department participated in a norming session using a departmentally-developed rubric and then staff-scored the memos. The resulting discussion uncovered recurring problems in the memos such as students’ failure to translate finance jargon into lay language or to create rhetorically effective graphics. Finance faculty began exploring ways to teach these skills earlier in the curriculum through new kinds of class activities or short writing assignments. At a deeper level, they explored ways to assign more

inquiry-based problems requiring arguments rather than standard algorithmic homework sets.

You can see that the assessment research of the finance faculty resulted in departmental discussions about a question that mattered to them. Their question wasn't initially about writing but about problem-solving in finance. I suspect that few of these faculty would have signed up for a typical WAC workshop. This is what I mean by the assessment movement's stimulating WAC in new ways.

*C.R. You have worked with faculty in dozens of disciplines in many institutions as a colleague and consultant. In your experience, can you categorize disciplines as more or less open to WAC pedagogy? In what fields do you feel your message is most welcome? Least welcome? Have you been surprised either by rejection or embrace of WAC in a particular situation?*

J.C.B. I'd say that the discipline least open to WAC is the literature side of English departments. There are many exceptions, of course, but in my experience few literature faculty are interested in WAC. I am saddened by this observation because I believe a WAC pedagogy can help new English majors learn to write critically about literary or cultural texts. Helping students learn to pose interpretive questions about texts and to position themselves in highly theorized conversations is a pedagogical challenge of the highest order. I think WAC discussions in English departments could accelerate English majors' growth as apprentice literary scholars and critics.

As far as the disciplines most open to WAC, I can't identify any particular patterns. I have long felt that the primary determinant of a teacher's openness to WAC is not discipline so much as personality type or a particular view of learning. Almost every department has one or two teachers who are energized by pedagogical workshops as well as many who dismiss pedagogy as lightweight methods training. (Often those uninter-

ested in pedagogy are highly regarded teachers; I'm not at all suggesting that great teaching depends on WAC practices.) Whether the degree of one's openness to WAC can be explained by personality or learning style theory such as Myers-Briggs or Kolb, I don't know. But persons interested in how students think and learn tend to like WAC. They are able to suspend direct discussions of subject matter to focus on meta-discussions of how experts read and talk and write in a discipline, how they conduct inquiry. I wonder if it would be too much to say that those open to WAC tend to remember what it was like to be a new learner in a discipline. Perhaps too they tend toward constructionist rather than positivist views of knowledge.

*C.R. Your book Engaging Ideas is often cited as a "WAC bible" and is a staple of faculty development programs. What led you to write Engaging Ideas? How has its popularity affected you?*

*J.C.B.* My interest in writing about WAC started at Montana State University when my colleagues Dean Drenk, Denny Lee, and I wrote an article on microthemes published in C. William Griffin's early WAC collection *Teaching Writing in All Disciplines* (Jossey-Bass, 1982). Our microtheme article combined critical thinking theory with nuts-and-bolts suggestions for incorporating short writing assignments into large classes. The positive responses to that article encouraged me to put more of my ideas about WAC into writing, especially ideas that combined theory with practical classroom applications. When I moved to Seattle University, I had the opportunity, under a grant from the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, to convert a series of handouts into an in-house book for Seattle University faculty illustrated with assignments from on-campus WAC workshops. That book became the first draft for *Engaging Ideas*, which I wrote during my sabbatical year in 1994-95.

I have been both gratified and stunned by the success of *Engaging Ideas*, which has indeed changed my life. I have met

wonderful teachers from across the United States and Europe in the process of conducting workshops based on the book's ideas. I try to make workshops fit the needs and situation of the institutions that invite me, and I regularly bring new ideas back to my own campus. But because I work full-time at Seattle University, combining teaching with faculty outreach in WAC and assessment, I find that doing workshops, along with my own textbook and research writing, puts enormous stress on me and my family. I often feel over-extended and exhausted. I am blessed, however, by a supportive wife who directs the writing center at a community college in Seattle and shares my passion for composition.

*C.R. I see from your resume that Engaging Ideas has been translated into Dutch. How did that happen?*

J.C.B. There is a growing movement in European higher education toward active learning in the curriculum including the use of new writing pedagogies. In the European system, there is no equivalent of first-year composition, nor are there liberal arts gen-ed requirements. Students in European universities plunge immediately into their professional disciplines. They often aren't required to write anything other than exams until late in their undergraduate careers when they must produce long seminar papers or a thesis in disciplinary academic style. Because students have no training or instruction on how to do this kind of writing, some European universities are experimenting with ways to teach or coach academic prose, as is evident from new professional organizations such as the European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing or the European Association of Writing Centers. At the 2003 CCCC convention in New York City, several sessions were devoted to WAC in international settings including a featured session on writing centers in Europe and South Africa and a presentation from writing teachers at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

The Dutch translation of *Engaging Ideas* is one aspect of this movement. A former nursing professor and textbook writer in Holland, Dr. Rob van der Peet, became interested in the American critical thinking movement and visited the United States to attend a series of workshops on critical thinking. During these workshops he came across *Engaging Ideas* and thought its practical orientation might have an influence on Dutch educators. He arranged for publication through a Dutch academic press and translated the book in 1998. While Rob was working on the translation, he and I became friends via email. Since then, my wife and I have stayed with Rob and his wife in The Netherlands, where we have experienced on several occasions the pleasures of biking through the Low Countries.

*C.R. As a classroom teacher, you consciously employ techniques to engage students and promote learning. Do you have the sense that students recognize this? Do they know what you are up to?*

J.C.B. I like to explain to students why I do what I do. I have been influenced by Kenneth Bruffee's views of collaborative learning and by George Hillocks' identification of the "environmental mode" of teaching in which teachers have clear goals, design sequenced assignments or tasks to help students learn desired skills or knowledge, and create a classroom environment that promotes inquiry and critical thinking. Students, often working in small groups, develop "best solutions" to teacher-designed problems and support their solutions with arguments. Teachers model critical thinking by critiquing their solutions and by showing how disciplinary experts might approach the same problem. They also create rubrics showing students the criteria by which their work will be judged. I make this process explicit to students, showing how my daily "thinking piece" assignments generate ideas for class discussions and upcoming writing assignments or exams. I want students to see that nothing is extraneous or tacked on as busy work. But my mode of teaching is just



one of many ways to teach. I'm not a very good lecturer, so Hillock's environmental approach fits my particular strengths. If a person is a good lecturer, then that way of teaching can be very effective also, with active learning and critical thinking built into the homework and assignment design of the course.

*C.R. If you were advising new faculty about ways to extend their teaching repertoire or to acquire killer strategies with the potential for advancing learning, what would you suggest? Do you look to new media? Networked environments? Something else?*

J.C.B. I advise new faculty to become more reflective about their teaching by developing course goals and becoming more conscious of their pedagogical choices. For example, in many instances a teacher can arrange classroom chairs in lecture rows, in a large circle, or in small groups. I'd like teachers to articulate why they make such a choice in the way they do. Likewise teachers can choose to assign one long term paper or several shorter papers. They can choose to comment on drafts or to read and comment on final copies only. They can choose to assign exploratory writing or not. The more teachers can explain their choices as conscious ways of helping their students achieve course goals, the more they are developing as reflective teachers.

The "killer strategy" I would like new teachers to learn is the value of giving students "ill-structured problems," a term I've picked up from cognitive psychologists. An ill-structured problem is open-ended and messy. It doesn't have a single right answer. It doesn't announce which data or which theories or approaches are relevant. It requires the thinker to propose a tentative best solution in light of all available data and to justify the solution with reasons and evidence while taking account of alternative views. The research problems we faculty pose for our own scholarship are ill-structured; as scholars we address problems that divide our research communities or constitute impor-

tant unknowns. Students come alive in the classroom when they wrestle with genuine disciplinary or civic problems. Once teachers see the power of assigning ill-structured problems—issues, conflicts, dissonance-producing situations—they have a variety of ways they can present these problems to students. They can give these problems as critical thinking tasks for exploratory writing, for class discussion or small group problem solving, or for short or long papers. The key is to get students thinking critically about issue-laden problems in a disciplinary field.

Your question also mentioned new media and technology. Many faculty have been successful at using networked environments for stimulating critical thinking and promoting discourse. The new technology also permits powerful multimedia work. Recently I have discovered how quickly some students learn rhetorical strategies in visual environments, for example, when they are asked to argue a claim within the genre of a visual poster, a verbal-visual advocacy advertisement, or an advocacy Web page. We clearly have to expand WAC into communication across the curriculum and to incorporate numeracy, information literacy, visual rhetoric, and speech into some of our assignments. Maybe what we really need is RAC—rhetoric across the curriculum—helping students make their emerging ideas publicly effective in a variety of genres and media.

*C.R. Any final thoughts, John?*

J.C.B. Thanks, Carol, for this interview opportunity. I think what sustains us in WAC (or CAC or RAC) is the pleasure of seeing our students grow as writers and critical thinkers. But I'm also sustained by the graciousness and collegiality of the WAC community. People attracted to WAC tend to be among the friendliest, most enthusiastic, and most supportive folks in the academy. What a pleasure! I've been fortunate indeed to find a career in the WAC community of innovative scholars and teachers across the disciplines.

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# **WAC**

# **Techniques and**

# **Applications**

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# Opening Dialogue: Students Respond to Teacher Comments in a Psychology Classroom

*Lynne Ticke, Bronx Community College/CUNY*

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Beginning in 1999, City University of New York (CUNY), significantly increased its commitment to Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) by funding faculty development, Writing Fellows, and Writing Intensive courses on the majority of its 18 campuses. With this renewed interest in WAC, administrators and faculty across the disciplines are increasingly taking responsibility for using writing processes to foster learning and thinking as well as teaching writing in the disciplines. As teachers use writing more as a communicative tool in the content areas, how they respond to students' writing becomes increasingly important.

As a WAC Coordinator at Bronx Community College (BCC), I have had the opportunity to work with faculty in professional development seminars. A common concern teachers often raise is how best to respond to students' writing. In turn, I, too, have often wondered how students in my classes react to my feedback on their written texts. Careful consideration of what we say and how we say it is an important part of good teaching practice. Teachers typically invest much time and effort in responding to students' texts with the assumption that their feedback will help improve students' writing. Teacher feedback takes on greater significance when students are revising their writing through multiple drafts. But what do students really think about our comments? Do our words help students move their thinking and writing forward on subsequent drafts?

Do students' understandings of our teacher feedback match our intentions? How do our responses make students feel about their writing, about themselves as writers, and about us? Creating more opportunities for dialogue between teachers and students about students' writing can shed light on such questions.

Classroom research has viewed instructional conversation or dialogic interaction as an important tool for facilitating thinking, learning, and reflective processes (See Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Mercer, 1995; Nystrand, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988 among others). However, despite teachers' efforts to encourage students' active participation and connections among language-based processes (e.g., speaking, reading, writing, and listening) in classrooms, one place where students are seldom asked to engage in or participate in dialogue is in response to teacher feedback on their written work.

One strategy for making writing and revision more interactive is to meet one-on-one with students to conference on their written texts. This is ideal, if the teacher is a skilled listener who has ample time. However, large class sizes, heavy teaching loads, and pressure to cover course content render one-on-one conferences with each student for every written assignment next to impossible. As an alternative to the face-to-face conference, teachers may create the conditions for dialogue between themselves and their students by inviting students to respond, in writing, to teacher feedback.

A closer examination of how students perceive teacher feedback is important for both student and teacher learning in a number of ways. First, encouraging dialogue between teacher and students invites students to actively engage in the writing process, transferring the responsibility for the writing and revising process to the student. Second, creating opportunities for dialogue helps students to see their writing as situated in a social context, highlights the social nature of language use, and encourages students' awareness of the reader in their writing process. Third, thinking about and reflecting on their writing in

response to teacher commentary encourages students to slow down their cognitive process, making their thinking an object of contemplation. When students are asked to reflect on their writing processes or encouraged to be more aware of them, their understanding improves. Fourth, offering students an opportunity to tell us how our comments make them feel allows us to be more aware of how our comments impact students not only cognitively but emotionally as well. Writing can be an emotionally-charged activity for students, especially if those students do not have positive identities of themselves as writers. At BCC, the majority of the students are developing their fluency with English and are underprepared in the skills of academic discourse. As a result, many of them approach their writing assignments with much anxiety. Bean (1996) reminds us to keep the writer in mind when responding to students' papers: "The best kind of commentary enhances the writer's feeling of dignity. The worst kind can be dehumanizing and insulting—often to the bewilderment of the teacher, whose intentions were kindly but whose techniques ignored the personal dimension of writing" (p. 239). As Bean suggests, at times, teachers may be unaware of the impact their comments may have on students' attitudes about themselves as learners and writers.

In addition to serving as a window into students' understandings and affective processes concerning writing and communication, an examination of students' responses to teacher commentary can foster important learning opportunities for teachers as well. Such an examination can enable teachers to review and reflect on their pattern of responding, to assess its effectiveness, and to examine whether or not it serves their teaching philosophy. Creating opportunities for dialogue about students' writing allows both teacher and students to become learners in the classroom.

Research on teacher response to students' writing has examined the types of teacher comments students prefer or find most helpful. Students seem to prefer comments that are tai-

lored to the specific text rather than generic (Straub, 1997; Zamel, 1995). Students find comments that are explicit in indicating exactly how a paper may be revised most helpful and prefer comments that provide reasons for the teacher's opinions (Lynch & Klemans, 1978; Sommers, 1982; Straub, 1997; Zamel, 1995; Ziv, 1984). In her study, Ziv (1984) found that inexperienced revisers preferred explicit and specific suggestions on how a paper might be improved. Additionally she found that comments that provided more implicit cues (i.e., less specific and exact) on how to revise a paper were more appropriate when the students had presented well-developed ideas. Straub (1997) found that students considered comments that focused on global matters (e.g., content and organization) as helpful as those that focused on local matters (e.g., grammar and wording). He also found that students did not like comments that seemed to appropriate or change what they were trying to say in their writing, and they preferred all forms of praise, especially praise that was accompanied by a reason why the work was good.

In an effort to better understand how my students were making sense of my written comments and to reflect on my own response style, I invited students in my psychology course to respond to my written feedback on their first drafts of a brief thought paper. In the following section I discuss a strategy I used for opening up dialogue between myself and my students that may be used on its own or in combination with face-to-face conferencing.

### **The Classroom Context**

Abnormal Psychology is a three semester hour course that introduces students to descriptions of major psychological disorders, theoretical perspectives, and treatment modalities. It is one of the psychology electives offered at BCC. The prerequisite for the course is Introduction to Psychology.

In my class, I value the use of language, language-based processes (e.g., reading and writing) and social interaction as

important tools for fostering reflection, thinking, and learning. Additionally, I view learning as most effective when the learner is actively engaged in the task. As a teacher, I believe it is important to set up conditions of learning that maximize students' strengths and help them expand upon their resources.

Given my teaching philosophy, I use a variety of teaching tools in my classroom. In addition to formal lectures, classroom discussion, and small group work, I use a number of low stakes and high stakes writing activities and assignments in the class. These activities include learning logs where students respond to structured questions based on their readings, quick in-class writing to facilitate thinking about relevant topics, multiple drafts of brief thought papers to encourage revision, and a research paper. Although the textbook, Alloy, Jacobson, and Acocella (1999) *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives*, is the primary text for the course, I typically augment the textbook with other readings in the field, such as articles from trade magazines, newspapers, and journals to expose students to different types of reading and writing tasks.

In the 2002 spring semester, 25 students enrolled in the class. They had diverse backgrounds in academic experience, English language fluency, and writing abilities. Most were majoring in Psychology and Human Services programs. With regard to their academic experience with college-level English, the majority of the students in the class had completed the first year of freshman English. A number of students were taking the second semester of freshman English concurrently with my course, and a number of students had completed an upper level English course. Although most of the students in my class had completed the first year of college-level English, many of them needed much writing practice to further develop their skills. Many of the students in my class had completed remedial English or ESL courses.



### **The Assignment**

I asked students to write a brief (2-3 pages) thought paper based on their reading of an article from a popular psychology magazine. The reading I selected presented a cross-cultural analysis of the behavioral symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). My purpose in giving this assignment to my students was twofold. First, I wanted students to gain experience reading, summarizing, and quoting appropriately in their writing from a course-related article (see Appendix for the assignment). I have found that students have difficulty with these aspects of the writing process. Second, I wanted to encourage students to develop their thinking and writing through the process of revision. I explained to students that they would be writing two drafts of their paper, that their first draft was an opportunity for them to put their thoughts down on paper as best they could, and that I would provide written comments to assist them in their revising process. I explained that only the final draft would receive a formal grade.

### **A Strategy for Opening Dialogue**

As part of the revising process, I asked students to complete and submit to me a *Student Response-To-Teacher Feedback Log*<sup>1</sup>. In class I explained to students how to complete their response logs. In the first column, students wrote my verbatim comments that appeared in their texts. In the second column, students indicated how the comment made them feel and in the third column, students indicated whether or not they understood what to do on their subsequent drafts. Students handed in their response logs along with their first and second drafts of their papers for the final assessment.

### **Analysis of My Response Pattern**

Inviting students to respond to my feedback enabled me to review my pattern of response to students' writing, to reflect on how effective specific comments were for students, and how my

responses related to my teaching philosophy. To systematically examine my pattern of response I conducted a content analysis on seven students' logs and drafts. This sample of students represented diverse backgrounds with regard to academic performance in the class, writing abilities, and language fluency. After students returned their logs and two drafts of their thought papers, I numbered each of my comments on their logs and first drafts. I then examined students' second drafts to determine whether or not students addressed my feedback.

I analyzed a total of 79 teacher comments. I examined my comments with respect to their form, instructional function, level of discourse addressed, and degree of specificity or explicitness adapting coding schemes developed by Bardine, Bardine and Deegan (2000) and Ziv (1984).

#### *Form of Teacher Comments*

I was able to group my comments into three form categories, similar to Bardine et al.'s data. These were 1) a word or words (e.g., *please revise for clarity*), 2) a symbol (e.g., underlining or circling a word), or 3) a combination of both words and symbols. My comments were fairly evenly distributed between words (47%) and symbols (42%). A smaller percentage (11%) of my comments took the form of a combination of the two. Typically, when I used words to comment on students' papers, it was to address some conceptual or structural concern. I most often used symbols when referring to local level concerns such as the use of "-ed" or focusing the student's attention on word choice. These more cryptic responses such as underlining a word or phrase or circling a word seemed to be confusing to some students, especially to those who had limited fluency in English.

#### *Function of Teacher Comments*

Using categories adapted from Bardine et al. (2000), I was able to organize my comments into five function categories.

These were: 1) questions: These comments ask the student a question about their writing (e.g., “*What differs from culture to culture?*”), 2) instructional comments: These comments inform the student how to improve their draft without explicitly telling them the answer (e.g., “*please clarify*”; “*please cite the authors using appropriate form*”), 3) praise: These are positive comments that acknowledge good work, (e.g., “*good introduction*”; “*good, more appropriate word choice*”), 4) attention focusing comments: These comments focus attention on an aspect of the student’s writing, typically with the use of a symbol without further explanation (e.g., “*causes*”), 5) corrections: These comments supply the correct answer (e.g., providing the correct spelling of a word).

Thirty-nine percent of my comments functioned as instructional comments. These comments informed students of how to improve on something without supplying the answer (e.g., “*Please support this statement*”; “*please revise sentence for clarity*”). These comments primarily focused on global level concerns such as content and organization. Another 29 percent of my comments functioned to bring students’ attention to some aspect of their text. These comments typically took the form of underlining or circling a word to bring students’ attention to a local level concern such as a grammatical or spelling error. Eighteen percent of my comments were corrections. These comments primarily focused on local concerns of punctuation, spelling, and grammar. Eight percent of my comments questioned students about some aspect of their writing (e.g., “*Are these symptoms prevalent in Bali or the U.S.?*”)

Only 6 percent of my comments functioned to praise students’ writing. In some cases this took the form of words (e.g., “*good introduction*”). In other cases, my praise was in the form of a check mark in the margin.

### *Level of Discourse*

My comments focused on two levels of discourse: 1) the

global level (e.g., conceptual and/or structural focus) and b) the local level (e.g., sentence, lexical, grammar, and spelling). More than half (58%) of my comments focused on the local level of discourse. These comments focused on word choice, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The remaining 42 percent of my comments focused on the conceptual or structural level of discourse. Overall these comments tended to focus on a request for conceptual clarification. In some instances these comments were specific (e.g., “*in which cultures do we find this behavior?*” or “*revise and place in your introduction*”). In other instances these comments were a more general request for clarification, (e.g., “*please revise for clarity*”). The comments that students seemed to find most helpful were ones that were specific with regard to suggested changes.

#### *Degree of Specificity (Implicit or Explicit Cues)*

I analyzed my comments with regard to their degree of specificity or explicitness. According to Ziv (1984), comments that provide *explicit* cues indicate specifically and exactly how the student might revise a paper. In contrast, she defined *implicit* cues as comments that offer possible suggestions for how to revise a paper or focus the student’s attention to an aspect of the text without explicitly telling the student how to improve a paper. More than half (53%) of my comments offered students implicit cues on ways to improve their drafts. The remaining 47 percent of my comments offered explicit and specific guidance on how to improve their drafts.

#### **Analysis of Students’ Responses**

Overall, creating an opportunity for dialogue by inviting students to respond to my feedback on their first drafts encouraged students to reflect on their writing. All of the students in my sample addressed the majority of my comments clearly in their second drafts. In some cases my comments facilitated students’ reflections about the nature of audience and the knowl-

edge that a reader might or might not have regarding the article. For example, in response to my request to clarify what she meant, one student wrote:

*I spoke of broken glass assuming that the reader would have read the article, not elaborating on why the glass was significant. I quoted the article, so my readers would understand what I was talking about.*

In other instances, students demonstrated an awareness of audience and reflected on the purpose of an introduction. For example, in response to my positive comment regarding her introduction, one student wrote:

*I felt great! I think introductions are extremely important because that's when you get to make your first impression about the material you're about to read. You want to capture your readers' attention and to do that, you need a good introduction.*

In another case I asked a student to be more specific with regard to the particular culture she was referring to when describing how the culture viewed particular symptoms of OCD. The following is an excerpt from her first draft:

*What is considered normal or abnormal behavior varies from country to country thus culture shapes or influences mental disorder[sic]. In the western world someone who repeatedly thinks he or she is hearing voices in their head like schizophrenia [sic] people, and in the east people think this [sic] normal as they are close to spirits that they believe are real. The two different perspectives affect the diagnosis of these people.*

In this case, I asked the student to “please be more specific” with regard to the “western world”. I underlined the second sentence and wrote, “please revise sentence for clarity”, I circled the word, “east” and wrote, “where, specifically?” In response to my feedback the student wrote:

*I was glad for the comments, so I can understand where I went wrong and am able to revise the paper well. I*

*knew where to correct my mistakes and was able to re-structure my paper a bit.*

Overall, this student made improvements on her second draft. In this section of her paper she provided more specific details which resulted in greater clarity for the reader. The following is her revision of the text:

*What is considered normal or abnormal varies from country to country. In the western world, for example America, someone who repeatedly hears voices in their head, this could be considered as schizophrenia, whereas in the east, like in Bali, people think this is normal as they are close to the spirit world. The two different perspectives affect the diagnosis of these people.*

Students also felt comfortable telling me when my comments made them feel confused. In some instances this seemed to reflect the students' difficulties in comprehending the assigned reading and in some cases the confusion reflected students' limited fluency in English. For example, one student indicated that she was confused by five of my twelve comments. All but two of these comments focused on the global (i.e., conceptual) level of the text and offered implicit cues. For example, on her first draft this student wrote:

*A same type of abnormal behavior is different in every culture. Some cultures are extreme in their abnormal behavior. It is because they have habits or customs that shape it, the majority of times in a worst way. The study of an abnormal behavior in a culture can help us to know that culture.*

In this section of the text I underlined the first sentence and wrote "What do you mean here? Please explain." In response to the log question, "how did the comments make you feel?" this student wrote:

*So confuse [sic]*

Additionally, in some cases, the specific form that my feedback took may have inadvertently confused some students. For

example, in several instances, my responses drew students' attention to a sentence or word-level problem with the use of a symbol. In the text example given above, I underlined "*in a worst way*" in the third sentence without offering further comments. This same student revealed her confusion by writing:

*I didn't understand because there arent [sic] any comment.*

In the column indicating, "did I know what to do next," this student wrote:

*Take out?*

It is not surprising that some students found this feedback confusing. The students who tended to be most confused by these cryptic comments were those who had limited fluency in English.

Despite this student's confusions, I found her responses helpful because they served as a window into her thinking process and helped me to reflect on the effectiveness of some of my comments. Rather than view these "confusions" as a major stumbling block, these "miscommunications" may serve as a teaching tool to open up further discussion regarding students' understandings of their reading and writing processes and my feedback. As a follow-up, I talked with several students about their confusions and some students sought the assistance of a writing tutor on campus.

Although some students were confused by my use of symbols such as underlining or circling a word, there were other students who seemed to understand these comments. For example, on one student's text I circled the word "*obsess*" in the following sentence:

*He noticed that people in the States are mostly concerned about germs while people in other countries like Cambodia, China, Bali, and others are obsess with knowing about new people.*

In response to this teacher comment, she wrote:

*I felt annoyed and frustrated. I thought I spell checked*

*and proofread over and over and still ended up with misspelled words.*

In response to “did I know what to do next” she wrote:

*I fixed the mistake.*

On her second draft, this student made the appropriate correction and added a quote from the article to support her point. In the case of another student’s text excerpted below, I circled the word, “causes” in the second and third sentences with the intention of inviting her to assess her word choice and to revise her text for clarity:

*Obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression affects people differently from many cultures. Culture greatly influences what causes mental disorders and how it is expressed. Obsessive-compulsive disorder causes people to constantly repeat actions, have frequent thoughts and worry constantly.*

In her second draft, this student used a more accurate word choice (i.e., “influence”) and revised her third sentence to express her thought more clearly:

*Obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression affects people differently from many cultures. Cultures greatly influence how to define what is a mental disorder and how it is expressed. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is the constant repeating of actions, having frequent thoughts, and worrying constantly.*

### **Reflections on my Pattern of Response**

This classroom research suggests that using the student response log fostered students’ greater attention to and reflections on their revising process and improvements on their subsequent drafts. Additionally, this technique enabled me to gain a window into students’ thinking about the usefulness of my comments. Engaging in this dialogue with my students enabled me to reflect on my pattern of responding in a systematic way. “Listening” to students allowed me to learn some important lessons



about responding to students' texts and resulted in several changes to my teaching practice. First, I have become more aware of highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement on students' texts. Helping students to identify their own strengths and weaknesses by highlighting them through our comments will help students become more effective evaluators of their skills and growth. Second, I try to avoid the more obvious cryptic comments and try to be more specific and elaborate with my commenting, especially in cases of students with limited fluency in English. I also emphasize the value of revision with my students both through classroom discussion and by having students engage in revision processes throughout the course.

### **Implications for Teaching**

I would like to address some of the challenges to creating dialogue in our classrooms and to offer some recommendations for teaching. One important challenge to creating more dialogic interaction around writing is students' perceptions of their own role in their learning and writing process. Although students come to the classroom with varied conceptions of themselves as learners, they often perceive their role in the learning process as a passive one. Research suggests that students often perceive teachers as someone who will read their writing and "fix it" or correct the errors. Additionally, students often feel that teacher feedback is not to be questioned. I believe students' perception of their role in the learning process is related to the role the teacher plays in this process. Many teachers may be reluctant to relinquish control over the learning/writing process and to step out of the traditional role as an evaluator of student performance. Addressing this issue in her own teaching, Ziv (1984) stated, "implied dialogues rarely happen because students invariably look upon their teacher as a judge and, consequently, see themselves as participants in a 'dialogue' in which they can do little but accept their teacher's criticisms"(p. 379).

As teachers we need to reflect on the potential messages

our feedback sends to students and more clearly understand the purpose of our responding on different texts. For example, comments that focus on both conceptual and grammatical concerns on the same draft may be too much for the student to focus on. An alternative to this is to assign multiple drafts with a clear writing/teaching focus on each which would then determine our level of response on the different texts (Sommers, 1982). For example, on first or early drafts the teacher might function more as a responder to the writer (e.g., commenting on the ideas). On the second or later drafts, the teacher's role as an evaluator of writing can play a greater function, focusing more on the mechanics of the text. Separating out these different aspects of the writing process on different drafts may help students to develop a greater awareness of the different components of the writing process, including composing, revising, and editing processes.

A third challenge to opening dialogue on a revising assignment is that students may not be familiar with the process of drafting and may not see the purpose or value in it. In this case, teachers will need to help students "see" the value in revision by building this into their classroom instruction and expecting that this is a developmental process that will grow over time. Creating different types of opportunities for students to respond to our feedback on different types of writing tasks may help students become more actively engaged in their writing and change their perceptions of their role in the writing process. With the appropriate structure and modeling, multiple draft assignments along with the invitation to students to respond to our feedback can help students gain control over their writing and become more conscious of the choices they make in their writing. By asking students to respond to our feedback and by listening to their responses we will become more aware of our own pattern of responding and the impact this has on students' learning. This knowledge will allow us to revise our teaching practices to help students become more reflective about their thinking and writing processes.

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## **Endnote**

- <sup>1</sup> This strategy was developed in collaboration with peers during a faculty professional development seminar focused on classroom inquiry, language, teaching, and learning.

## **Appendix**

[Sample of Assignment]

Please read the attached article by Robert Lemelson and Jeffrey Winters (2000) and answer the following questions. Please write your paper in essay format. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, and use a font size of 12.

1. In your own words please summarize the main points of the article.
2. According to the article, how does culture shape or influence mental disorders?
3. Citing specific examples from the article, discuss how the same disorder is expressed differently in different cultures. Please include two direct quotes from the article, using appropriate citations.

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# **WAC and WID**

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# Writing to Learn in Mathematics

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The majority of people, mathematicians included, think that writing out formulas is exactly what we call writing in mathematics. I was guilty of the same preconceptions before I started to work with the Writing Across the Curriculum Project at Medgar Evers College (WAC @ MEC). The definition of writing to learn that we use at MEC helped me come up with the idea that served as the basic principle for my further experiments and conclusions as I implemented writing to learn in mathematics. Our definition of WAC @ MEC is this:

We define writing across the curriculum as a means to connect writing to learning in all content areas. We define writing as the process through which students think on paper, explore ideas, raise questions, attempt solutions, uncover processes, build and defend arguments, brainstorm, introspect, and figure out what's going on. We define all of these as thinking. Writing to learn across the curriculum provides a potent way for students to exercise their own voices as well as to take on new voices which represent their knowledge of the content and the language of the discipline they are learning (Lester, et. al, 2000, p.4).

The words that I have underlined gave me the idea of what the concept of writing to learn in mathematics should be—learning the new language of the new discipline.

### **Why Do We Have to Write in Mathematics?**

My long experience as a college professor, as well as my being a foreign professor teaching in the United States and having English as a second language, has allowed me to notice a similarity between learning mathematics and learning a foreign language. Mathematics, just as any other subject, has its own very specific language in which every word is rigorously defined. For example, a common word, like “between,” when used in geometry obtains a very precise meaning: We say that point C is **between** points A and B if and only if all three points are on the same line and  $AC + CB = AB$ . Often the words are defined in terms of formulas; this is the nature of mathematics. But at the same time, all formulas have verbal meanings that are analogous to the translation from one language to another and work as a glossary. For example, the well-known formula  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  has an equivalent translation that can be read as “the sum of the squares of the legs of the right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse.”

In narrative language, we cannot use a word correctly in context if we do not know what it means, even though we might know the word and can spell it. The same is true for mathematics: Even knowing a phrase, for example, “an increasing function,” but being unable to explain the concept means we cannot solve a simple problem of finding the intervals of increase and decrease of a given function.

It is impossible to conceive of learning a second language without writing. ESL professors say: “What ESL students need [are] multiple opportunities to use language and write-to-learn” (Zamel, V., 1995, p.261). One type of using language to learn occurs in exercises in translation from one language to another in writing. The same should be done in mathematics: translation of the formulas (explanation of the formulas) in narrative English (or any other language) and vice versa needs to be made in order to understand the mathematics involved. This translation should be done in writing for these reasons:

- 1) Writing allows students to organize their thoughts. James Britton, in his 1970 book *Language and Learning*, argues that language is central to learning because through language we “organize our representation of the world” (Russell, D.R., 1990, p. 277). A written statement can be revised and corrected, and “revising or *re-vision* means taking another look, to see again what has already been seen, but this time from a different perspective” (Mayher, J.S., Lester, N., Pradl, G.M., 1983, p.43 ).
- 2) Written means visualized, and it is easier to see a mistake rather than to hear it. When we speak we compose. When we write we compose even better because we can manipulate our compositions on paper, in addition to holding them in our heads. We can re-view them, revise them and re-write them because they are now visible and concrete (Fulwiler, T.,1983, p. 279).
- 3) Many people have dominant visual and motor memory, which means they learn written words more easily than words they just hear or read.
- 4) No other class assignment gives such complete feedback as a written assignment, because usually in class not everybody speaks up and asks questions and often the level of students’ misunderstanding is shown only on the test when students are already beyond help.

### **Experimental Writing to Learn in Precalculus**

For the implementation of all of these principles, I chose my Precalculus class. It was chosen for the experiment because in our college, Precalculus is the first serious course in mathematics that students majoring in the sciences must take. And science students were chosen because they understand the importance of mathematics in their education and more comfortably accept innovations in teaching than students for whom mathematics is a necessary burden they have to pass and forget. As a rule, students who take Precalculus have algebraic skills



and know how to manipulate formulas, but have a very limited conceptual understanding of the subject, which is absolutely necessary for all upper level courses in mathematics.

While working on theoretical aspects of writing to learn, I used traditional methods of teaching and gave a traditional test. One of the test's problems was *Determine the intervals over which the function is increasing, decreasing, or constant.* The function was given in symbolic form. I did not ask for verbal explanations. Students were supposed to draw the graph of the function using a graphing utility, estimate x-coordinates of maximum and minimum points, and write all intervals on which the function increases in the form  $(x_{\min}, x_{\max})$  and all intervals on which the function decreases in the form  $(x_{\max}, x_{\min})$ . There were no intervals on which the function is constant.

Only half the students solved the problem correctly. Some of them did not know where to start; some of them found several x-coordinates of max and min points but did not know what to do with them. After the exam, I asked the students to describe the problem in their own words by prompting them with the following question: *What does it mean graphically that function increases or decreases on certain intervals?* I expected very simple and general explanations, like the following:

*On the intervals where the function increases, the graph rises; on the intervals where the function decreases, the graph falls; in order to define the end points of the intervals where the function increases or decreases, find the x-coordinates of maximum and minimum points.*

The students' answers confirmed the grades they received: The ones who solved the problem correctly were able to explain the concept of increasing and decreasing function in their own words; the ones who could not solve the problem gave a variety of unacceptable written responses. Below, I introduce the whole spectrum of students' responses, from unacceptable to effective, in the language they used to answer the prompt. I want to point

out that I did not pay attention to grammar, punctuation, or completeness of sentences, but focused only on the mathematical content, even though I was shocked by the lack of ability that English-speaking people had to express their thoughts in writing.

### Students' Writing to Learn

As I pointed out above, students were to describe in their own words the graphical meaning of increasing or decreasing function. Student A's answer was:

*The intervals increases and decreases is where the functions connect with  $x$  and the  $y$  is  $x$  or  $-x$  it is decreasing and where the  $y$  both increases in value after decreasing.*

This sentence does not make any sense, and it reveals a lack of understanding of the concept.

Student B remembered my explanation of using a computer for finding the intervals over which function increases or decreases, but she did not understand the definition and, as a result, she could not solve the problem. Her answer was:

*We put the cross in the two points where the cross is up and down to get the  $x$ -intervals where it is increase and decrease.*

She understands what points you have to pay attention to, but does not know what to do with them.

At the same time, the students who solved the problem were able to explain the concept. Sometimes they did it in simple words, such as Student C:

*Where function increases - as  $x$ -values increase the curve goes upwards. Where function decreases - as  $x$ -values increase the curve goes downward.*

This explanation could be written in more standard English, but it is clear that the student understands the idea of increasing and decreasing functions and, as the test showed, knows how to use it.

Student D gave a more detailed explanation:

*To determine where the function decrease, I will go to the left side of the graph and I will take all the x-values where my function is decreasing, which is  $(-x, -2)$ . I stop by  $-2$  because it is the last point where the function is decreasing in that part. After that function goes up which is mean the function is increasing.*

Again, the sentence is a little bit awkward in terms of standard English, but very precise in the understanding of the concept: the student understands that he has to move along the graph from left to right identifying x-coordinates of the maximum and minimum points. He uses the words “goes up” meaning “increases.”

Other students’ answers confirm the direct correspondence between perception of the definition, the ability to explain it, and the capability to solve problems.

I cannot help but mention one explanation, which is not only absolutely correct but also very poetic. Answering the question: *What is the maximum of a function?*; Student E. wrote:

*[The] max of the function is where increase meets decrease.*

Rigorous mathematicians might argue the mathematical preciseness of that explanation, but its visual and imaginative accuracy is undoubted. One can see how the graph of the function rises to the maximum point and then falls down.

While covering the next chapter in the textbook and preparing students for the next test, I specified the basic definitions and procedures students had to know to be able to solve the problems. In the beginning of the classes, students were given the prompts to write definitions, explanations, and algorithms of problem-solving. One of the most important concepts in studying rational functions is the notion of vertical and horizontal asymptote. Students had to write the definitions of the vertical and horizontal asymptotes, like the one that follows:

The line  $x = a$  is a vertical asymptote for the graph of  $y = f(x)$  if  $f(x)$  either increases or decreases without

bound as  $x$  approaches  $a$  from the right or from the left. The line  $y = b$  is a horizontal asymptote for the graph of  $y = f(x)$  if  $f(x)$  approaches  $b$  as  $x$  increases without bound or as  $x$  decreases without bound.

And they had to describe the procedure for finding them:

To find the vertical asymptote set the denominator of the function equal to zero, solve for  $x$ , then the line  $x = a$ , where  $a$  is a solution of the above mentioned equation, is a vertical asymptote. To find the horizontal asymptote, consider degrees of the numerator,  $m$ , and the denominator,  $n$ , and leading coefficient of the numerator,  $a_m$ , and the leading coefficient of the denominator,  $b_n$ . If  $m < n$ , the line  $y = 0$  is a horizontal asymptote. If  $m = n$ , the line  $y = a_m/b_n$  is a horizontal asymptote. If  $m > n$ , there are no horizontal asymptotes.

From reading students' papers, I found conceptual misunderstandings that I would never have thought of. Some students did not understand that an asymptote is a line; they thought that it was a number. Others thought that only coordinate axes could be the asymptotes. Some of them described the procedure for finding the asymptote correctly but did not know how to apply it. For example, student A's answer was:

*Set the denominator equal to zero.*

That is a correct answer, but he wrote the wrong definition of the vertical asymptote itself as an answer to the prompt, *Write down the definition of the horizontal asymptote*, and so he does not know what to do with his answer, *denominator equal to zero*, and cannot draw a correct line.

Often students do not understand the difference between the definition and the procedure for finding the object. For example, answering the question about the definition of the horizontal asymptote, student E wrote:

*Horizontal asymptote - if the degree of the equation*

*are the same then the horizontal asymptote is the ratio of the coefficients of the leading terms. If the degree of the numerator is less than the denominator then the x-axis is the asymptote. If the degree of the numerator is greater than the denominator then there is no horizontal asymptote.*

This is a typical example of the confusion between a definition and the procedure: a horizontal asymptote is a horizontal line that satisfies to certain conditions, and in order to find an equation of that line we have to consider the relationship between degrees of the polynomials in the numerator and denominator of the function.

I had never had such complete information about each individual student's knowledge of the topic before a test until I began using writing to learn. I organized, as a discussion session, the review session on this topic. Students were very enthusiastic about discussing the subject and trying to find and correct mistakes their classmates made. Together, we made up correct definitions and procedures.

The test consisted of several problems where the students had to analyze given rational functions and sketch their graphs using information obtained in the analyses part. My disappointment was tremendous when I found out that many students described completely and correctly all the necessary steps in the analyses part, but eventually could not sketch the graph of the rational function, which was the final goal of the problem. That means that students cannot see the whole beneath the parts. They are able to solve simple problems such as finding the equations of the asymptotes or x- and y-intercepts of the function, but they are unable to sketch the graph of the function even though they have all the necessary information.

For the rest of the semester I continued to work in this class using the same scheme: (1) identifying the basic concepts of the topic studied; (2) making students respond in writing to short prompts, and (3) discussing their answers during the next class.

The final results were very encouraging: Almost half of the students received high grades; only two students failed, but I could, based on their writing to learn, predict this after the first few weeks of the semester. In comparison with my usual results in Precalculus classes—no more than 20 percent of high grades and no less than 20 percent of failing grades—this outcome looks wonderful. Moreover, at least four students wanted to start research in mathematics even though they did not complete the calculus sequence.

### **What I Learned: Possibilities and Challenges**

No other form of class work or homework gives such powerful feedback as short written “low stakes” assignments (Elbow, P., 1997, p.5) in class, i.e. the prompts that are not graded. The professor can see very clearly what every individual student does not understand. Sometimes students make a mistake the professor would never dream of; for example, the student’s misconception that asymptote is a number. It is always useful to talk in class about these kinds of rare mistakes; one can look at the problem from different points of view. “Low stakes” writing assignments help to organize individual work with students. The professor knows the strengths and weaknesses of each student and the ways each individual learns.

Students know that they will have writing assignments in class and take more effort to prepare for the lesson, since, psychologically, they take writing to learn more seriously than ordinary homework. Students usually are not ashamed if they do not submit homework, but they feel uncomfortable if they should submit a blank paper when they are supposed to respond in writing to a prompt. Discussion of papers in class (anonymous) and attempts to find and correct mistakes help students understand and learn the covered material. This kind of work enlivens the teaching and learning process and reduces the routine and monotony of lecturing.

At the same time, there are many professional problems in

any serious implementation of “writing to learn.” The prompts for low stakes writing should be very clearly formulated and not leave any ambiguities. Writing in mathematics is very unusual for the students and we do not want them to be more confused than they already may be. An unclearly stated prompt, like *Describe the step-by-step procedure of how to graph any polynomial function* in Precalculus led to incomplete answers. Student R answered this way:

*1) find the zeros by factoring, 2) plot the points of the x-axis, 3) then find the y-intercept, 4) join the points with a smooth curve, 5) find the leading coefficient and determine the left hand and right hand behavior of the polynomial.*

Even when taking into consideration some minor mistakes (e.g. one can not always find zeros by factoring, no indication of how to join the points with a smooth curve, or right hand and left hand behavior depends not only on the leading coefficient but on the degree of the polynomial as well), it is obvious that Student R understands what he is talking about.

But my goal was obviously to get a more extensive explanation. Precisely, I wanted to know how the leading coefficient and degree of the polynomial influences the right hand and left hand behavior, how to find the x- and y-intercept, and how to define the behavior of the function between the consecutive zeros. It is apparent that I should have formulated my question more comprehensively: *Describe the step-by-step procedure of how to graph any polynomial function. Include a complete explanation of the Leading Coefficient Test, describe all specific points you need for the graphing, and explain how to find the behavior of the function between consecutive zeroes.* Learning from my own mistakes, I plan to make up focused assignment descriptions for the whole semester and discuss them with colleagues.

The necessity of reading many papers every day is time consuming. Writing appropriate comments takes even more time.

The comments should not include just the correction of mathematical mistakes, but rather responses aimed at stimulating students' thinking about resolving the problem in a different way. Let me emphasize here that I am not talking about grammar or spelling, only about factual mathematical mistakes. It is very hard to come up with a few general comments that one can use in different cases. Mistakes students make are unpredictable, and sometimes the only comment I really want to make is *Where have you been while we studied this topic?*

Here is an example of my comments on the student's answer to the question on the step-by-step procedure of how to graph any polynomial function. Student J wrote:

*First identify the leading coefficient to determine whether it is odd or even. If the coefficient is odd and positive, the graph falls at negative infinity.*

My comment was *Oddness or evenness of the leading coefficient has nothing to do with the graph's behavior.* My intention was to identify what was wrong with the answer. But rather than giving the student the correct answer directly, I provided her with hints that would steer her in the right direction. I wanted her to recall that oddness or evenness of the degree of the polynomial rather than oddness or evenness of the leading coefficient plays an important role in the right and left hand behavior of the function.

It is very hard to find time for individual work with students. Very often students cannot come during office hours. To talk in class if there are more than fifteen students enrolled is simply impossible. The only remaining thing to do is to compile a list of the most commonly made mistakes and to discuss them in class. This reduces the number of students who require individual attention.

Beyond the usefulness that WAC has played in my classes, I cannot help but mention the impact it has had on me as a writer. Being a pure mathematician, I was not exposed to extensive writing even though I have written innumerable papers and a



Ph.D. thesis. In mathematics it is simply definitions and proofs with a few sentences in between. Add to this the lack of English as my native language, which is Russian, and you have a typical basic writer. I feel much more comfortable and confident working on my own papers after a year of WAC.

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# A Framework for Analyzing Varieties of Writing in a Discipline

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## **Abstract**

Writing across the curriculum means more than creating opportunities to learn by writing; it means, also, focusing on the nature of writing for particular purposes, in particular fields. In Australia, B.A. students are required to write extensively for all of their courses, but usually receive no theoretically-informed instruction about writing itself. This paper offers a framework that discipline specialists and their students might use in analyzing the varieties of writing in their field, to inform the students' subsequent choices of suitable forms and language when they write for different audiences in a professional role. The paper follows the application of this framework in an archaeology subject where an academic skills adviser collaborated with an archaeology lecturer in inviting upper level students to closely examine the discourse of their profession.

## **Introduction**

While writing across the curriculum developed in North America in an effort to carry the focus on writing from freshman English into further disciplines and later years, the situation in Australia has been very different. Here, as in Britain and in other education systems derived from the British model, writing has always been a central mode of learning throughout the humanities, and is often the only way that students demonstrate

their learning for assessment. At the university where I work as an academic skills adviser, students write as much as 15,000 words each semester, across the range of subjects that they study. Virtually none of this is personal writing or opinion pieces, but academic argument based on reading and research.

In many ways this is an enviable situation, as it promotes writing-to-learn, the generation of authentic, extensive writing tasks within the contexts of the disciplines, and response, by discipline teachers, to both the learning and the writing. On the other hand, although so much writing is required, hardly anybody teaches it. There is no composition course, nor any English requirement. Students are expected to come from school with the skills they will need to write at university, even though the kind of writing we require is different from the personal or public writing they are used to. If they are successful in writing at university, it is because they pick up ambient clues to the differences, or read (good) books on study skills, or consult an adviser like myself, or attend the classes that such advisers offer—usually for no credit, and seldom, therefore, very well-attended.

Thus, while writing is at the forefront of academic learning, the teaching of writing is not, so that students can approach the end of their degree proficient in essay writing but lacking any strategies for analyzing the features of different kinds of writing and adjusting their approach to the more varied demands of writing in their profession. For this reason, I have been asked in recent years to work with the coordinator of an upper-level archaeology subject, helping her students to think about the ways in which reading and writing for colleagues are different from reading and writing for the public. An archaeologist is at various times an academic, a negotiator, an advocate, and a popularizer, and needs a range of styles for every change of hat. In developing an approach for archaeology students, however, I tried to arrive at one that could be used in any field to examine its varieties of writing, one that could be used by teachers in the

disciplines as well as by writing teachers. I would like to describe this process here, in the hope that readers will find it useful as our own staff and students have.

### **Collecting “texts” on which to focus**

I approached this as an ethnographic project of identifying what archaeologists do and the discourse patterns they use, and inviting the students to look at the range of choices available. First, I collected samples of oral texts by attending the weekly departmental seminar and noting the patterns of sentence structure. For my written samples, the subject coordinator provided two pieces by the same authors, and concerned with the same subject matter: a cluster of sites that Aboriginal people had occupied in the distant past. These publications, however, were addressed to very different audiences, which made them ideal for the kind of comparison I wanted to do. One was an article in an academic journal, reporting on the dates of occupation of these sites and their significance for the discipline (Bird, Frankel, & Van Waarden 1998). The other was a booklet addressed to a non-specialist audience of Aboriginal stakeholders in this project, to let them know what the academics had discovered about the lifeways of their ancestors who had occupied these sites (Bird & Frankel 1998). By producing this booklet, the archaeologists sought to acknowledge the partnership between academics and indigenous people in the exploration of the sites (rather than simply appropriating such remains, as an earlier generation of scientists had done). To fulfill this social function, the booklet needed to be accessible, but also somewhat formal to express respect for the work and for the audience. My third text (Keyser 2000)—an article in *National Geographic* about a newly-excavated hominid site in Africa—was also written for non-specialists. This one, however, was a hybrid of popular science crossed with adventure story. It had the science of the stakeholders’ booklet, but lacked its gravitas.

**Analyzing the texts**

In order to analyze these texts with the students, I set up a table with a list of salient features down the side and space, reading across, to note how each of these features was manifested in each of the three texts. This framework revealed both consistencies within each text and differences between them. It could be used to examine a range of written products in any field of study, as it gives students an easy way of lining up the common and divergent characteristics of different kinds of texts.

**Table 1**

Features of writing	journal article	stakeholders' booklet	popular magazine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author(s)</li> <li>• Venue/ audience</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• Accommodation to/ interaction with audience (in prose &amp; in visual aids)</li> <li>• Language               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical terms</li> <li>Sentence length (average &amp; range)</li> <li>Lexical density</li> <li>Grammatical metaphor</li> <li>Passive verbs</li> <li>Use of first person</li> <li>Emphatic expressions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

**Purpose**

In completing the table above, we generated many pages of observations, which there is space only to summarize here. I have noted the authors of the samples from archaeology above, and described the publications and their intended readers. The purpose of the academic article was to report to the discipline community on the authors' testing of dates obtained by previous re-

searchers for a cluster of excavations. In the stakeholders' booklet, the same authors had a dual purpose: to provide archeological information about Aboriginal art and occupation in the region to the community which had given permission for the study; and to raise the awareness of local people about the need for good site management. The magazine article sought to inform an interested public about a new hominid site in the process of being excavated.

### **Structure**

The structures of these texts matched the purpose and audience in every case. The academic article roughly followed the conventional structure of a research article: a sequence of abstract, introduction, findings, and a discussion section canvassing the implications of the new dates, which contradicted previous assumptions about the depth of settlement in the region. It concluded by outlining the next phase of the work.

While the article built up to the significance of the findings for activity within the discipline of archaeology, the booklet addressed itself to its readers' interest in their own cultural past. The significance of its findings, therefore, was explicit early on: "that Aboriginal occupation of the ranges goes back more than 20,000 years" (Bird & Frankel 1998, p. 1). As in the academic article, the middle section discusses the earlier research in the area, then the present research. Unlike the academic article, however, the booklet does not confine itself to the testing of dates, but is broader and more informative. It describes the styles of rock art present and what can be inferred from the excavation about the lifeways of the early inhabitants—their environment, their diet, and their tools. The text finishes with a section on site management, stressing the need for cooperation in protecting the sites and reporting new discoveries. The second half of the booklet comprises 48 slides, each with a paragraph of explanatory text, as a resource for those involved in the project to disseminate its work.

The article in *National Geographic* begins with a paragraph superimposed upon a full page photograph, identifying the nature and age of the find, and the site. There follows a narrative of discovery, an explanation of the process of site formation, a description of the lifeways inferred from the remains that have been found, and a discussion of the problems of interpreting the finds.

### **Interactions with the audience**

In any piece of writing, the writer interacts with the audience either overtly or covertly, and in these pieces we see a range of interactions, from the stylized distance conventional in academic articles, to the equally fictitious proximity constructed in the popular magazine. Rather like actors blinded by the footlights but nonetheless acutely conscious of the audience seated around, academic authors acknowledge their readers—the other members of their discipline—in a number of ways, all of them indirect. There is the abstract, which flags the work for others who will search the databases. There is the account of earlier work by the authors' predecessors, and the in-text references by which colleagues are shown to their seats in the first few rows. The significance of the data being reported lies in its implications for the work of these others, who are told about these implications without being directly addressed. The authorial "we" surfaces only in the acknowledgements, where it is difficult to envisage a graceful alternative.

In the brief space of the *National Geographic* article, by contrast, "I" is used 36 times! This is consistent with an early editor's prescription for communicating the "living, breathing, human interest truth about this great world of ours.... Each [article] was [to be] an accurate, eyewitness, firsthand account" (Grosvenor, 1957, pp. 23-4, quoted in Gero & Root 1990, p. 21). "You" appears only once, but there are other devices that work to make the audience feel that they are present in the writing. For example, the writer identifies himself with his readers, and invites them to share his feelings as he made his discovery: "I was

just a geologist looking for a retirement hobby [just regular folks, like you]... poking around....I stumbled across ....I was thrilled, but I had no idea.... Imagine my feelings..." (Keyser 2000, p. 78). At the same time, readers are brought closer to the subject matter by photographs of researchers at work on the site. Moreover, the writer identifies his subject with both himself and his readers, by describing his project as "the continuing search for our origins." Again, this identification is a matter of policy at *National Geographic*, according to a study of the magazine by Gero and Root (1990). This, in turn, is supported by dramatic imaginative drawings of hominids in human-like social groupings, with familiar gendered behavior (based on nothing in the article!): males are advancing with weapons and threats, defending against some unseen menace, a group of females and children huddled in the background.

In the booklet, the authors are not a strong presence, but they do come out from time to time. They use the first person roughly once per page, but mainly to comment on what they can or cannot conclude from their findings, rather than to tell a story. There are some devices that invite the reader to identify with the project, but not many. The cover is a photo of some rock art, which invokes the ethnic heritage of the reader, and it says the booklet was "prepared for Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Aboriginal Communities in Western Victoria." There are photos, too, of Aboriginal participants in the project. The study is introduced, on p. 1, as "A recent research project involving local Aboriginal communities..." although the academic article describing the same research makes no mention of this fact. Finally, the booklet discusses the implications for heritage management, and instructs the client group on their responsibilities in this regard: "Any artifacts found should be left in place..." (Bird & Frankel 1998, p. 3).

### **Accommodation to the audience's needs**

Envisaging a particular audience, each writer provides the information and explanations the readers will need in order to



follow the presentation, and no more. The academic article uses many technical terms, the others few, and while the academic article provides no explanation of things unlikely to be known to lay readers—because none are expected to read it—the others take care to put readers in the picture with visual aids and verbal explanations.

The booklet, for example, sets the scene with colored photographs that locate each research site in space. More photographs show people at work, the methods used, and the objects found. A time line locates the research in time, while colored maps show how the environment has changed. The booklet explains several unfamiliar concepts: what archaeologists mean by “recent,” sources of site disturbance, processes of site formation and of contamination, behaviors associated with particular types of remains, changes in environment, methods of making pigment for rock art, and the methods of tool making and functions of the tools. None of this is needed by readers of the academic article on the same research project, and none of it is offered there.

Like the booklet, the magazine article offers explanations that will help a lay audience to appreciate the meaning and significance of the information. Together with an inset timeline, verbal explanations focus on the time scale (“*A. robustus* lived successfully for a million years—eight times the reign so far of modern humans.” Keyser 2000, p. 79), physical and behavioral comparisons with modern humans, site formation, and the process of archaeological reasoning from finds. Another strategy that lends immediacy to the information is the presentation of the hominids’ adaptation to their environment in the form of a narrative. “About 2.5 million years ago southern Africa was drying....the forest largely turned into grassland....For *A. robustus*...this meant living on tough foods like roots, tubers, and seeds instead of softer foods like fruit. The hominids developed large jaws and molars to handle this fare...” (Keyser 2000, p. 81).

Also like the booklet, the magazine article makes much use of pictures and diagrams. There are color photographs of the site,

of people at work, and of their finds, as well as drawings, diagrams, and an artist's imagined reconstructions. Maps take the reader into the site, and a simple representative drawing of a cross-section of the landscape (complete with grass) shows how a debris cave is formed. And where anatomical features of the hominids are illustrated—skulls and muscles—they are juxtaposed with those of modern humans.

Although the academic article has illustrations, they are of a very different sort: aimed at locating the information in the work of the discipline, rather than in time and space. The schematic map lacks any textural features that could suggest a physical place. The data are identified by technical terms, and tabulated for scientific comparison under headings such as square, spit, sample number, lab number, radiocarbon date, and calibrated range. For two of the sites, the finds are plotted in a figure with years BP on a vertical axis, and depth below surface on the horizontal axis. These visual aids are ones that would help fellow scientists—and only fellow scientists—to understand the meaning and significance of the information.

## **Language**

In their structure, information, and visual aids, then, the publications were demonstrably designed for different kinds of readers. In their language, too, this was to prove the case; but to examine this, we needed to establish some metalanguage with which to talk about the varieties of style that we encountered. While I drew on Joseph Williams and on systemic functional linguistics for this, I tried to devise economical, non-technical explanations as far as possible. It was necessary to establish the basic terminology of subject and verb, on which Australian students are typically quite shaky. I told them that an English sentence usually tells us that “someone or something is or does something”; the someone or something is the subject, and what they are or do is the verb. Grammarians will see many things lacking in this rather primitive formulation, but it does the job.

*Readability*

As was to be expected, technical jargon was common in the journal article but rare in the others. However, the students' expectation that "plain English" meant short sentences was not borne out. In the booklet, sentences were generally shorter than in the academic article (1/2 to 2/3 as long), but in *National Geographic*, which certainly "felt" the most readable of the three, the sentences were often longer than in the academic article, without detracting from readability. For example, Keyser (2000) explains why his fossils are found only in caves:

One popular theory is that in order to avoid competition from scavengers like hyenas, leopards ate their prey in trees that clustered near caves, and the remains of their meals fell into the cave entrances. [35 words]  
I think it's more likely that the cats cached their prey in the caves. (p.77)

What seemed to distinguish less from more accessible writing was not the length or complexity of sentences, but the sense of engagement communicated—a greater or lesser degree of distance both between the author and the research, and between the author and the audience. To show the students how language choices contributed to this distance, I asked them to think about the processing demands made on the reader.

*Introducing some metalanguage: density and grammatical metaphor*

An audience's comprehension depends partly on what they already know about the field of study, the topic, and/or the technical terminology. Processing is also affected, however, by how tightly ideas are packed into a sentence. One measure of this is lexical density, or the proportion of words in a sentence that must be attended to, an imprecise but useful notion (Halliday 1985, pp. 61-75). Even more important, however, is the degree of abstraction in the writing. Academic writing achieves a high degree of abstraction by rolling lots of actions into nouns, which are then allowed to stand for that whole complex of activities:



This version, congruent with our experience that *people* do things, is half as dense as the previous one, with 6 out of 12 words that need to be attended to. Of course, Archaeology students do not need to unpack this sentence, as they already know what it means; but when I gave them a sentence of exactly the same structure, about something they did not know about, they could see the problem:

“Nominalization increases sophistication in writing.”

They really did need this to be unpacked, to say who does what:

“If you use a noun to describe a process, you make your writing sound more sophisticated.”

To underline the difference that congruent grammatical subjects make to ease of processing, I showed the students my record of the subjects and verbs that the speakers had used in their seminar presentations. They saw that the presentation they had found most difficult to comprehend had used a lot of inanimate subjects, while the most accessible had used animate ones (Table 2, subjects in bold):

**Table 2**

<b><u>Least accessible</u></b>	<b><u>Most accessible</u></b>
I shall try to argue...	People were living in...
These <b>arguments</b> are based on...	<b>People</b> were eating off... of very plain china...
An important <b>point</b> is...	The <b>people</b> were kind of... having a regression...
<b>Material culture</b> plays a role...	<b>They</b> were going back to...
<b>Gender</b> has always been involved...	<b>This</b> seemed to me...
<b>Naturalized views</b> were rejected...	<b>It</b> looked a lot like...
The <b>discipline</b> was attacked...	<b>It</b> got me started looking at...
<b>Gender ideology</b> is seen...	
A <b>framework</b> was developed...	

We noted two other features of the more accessible presentation, as well, that created a sense of engagement with both the subject matter and the audience. First, it was a narrative of the presenter’s thinking about a problem; by unfolding her thought process in this way, she invited the audience to go along with her. Second, this effect was enhanced by her use of the first person – “I” and “me.”

*Density and grammatical metaphor in the texts*

When we counted the important words per sentence in the first few paragraphs of each text, we were surprised to find that the texts for non-specialist readers were not less dense than the scholarly journal article. The stakeholders’ booklet was about the same – one word in two required attention, on average – but the *National Geographic* piece was actually higher, ranging from 1/2 to 2/3. If it was more demanding, then, in terms of density (as well as sentence length), what was it that made it more readable?

The impressionistic answer to this is that it was livelier, and the grammatical explanation lay in the grammatical subjects the author had chosen. While the journal article had a low proportion of animate subjects, and the stakeholders’ booklet had a low to medium proportion, the proportion in *National Geographic* was medium to high, e.g.:

**Table 3**

<u>Journal article</u>	<u>Stakeholders’ booklet</u>	<u>Magazine article</u>
<b>Reports</b> were produced	<b>Phases...</b> can be identified	the <b>site</b> has yielded
Much... <b>work</b> remains unpublished	The oldest <b>art...</b> comprises	<b>protohumans</b> became
<b>It</b> is...unfortunate	<b>Pigment</b> would have been made	<b>I</b> found
The <b>program</b> was never brought to a proper conclusion	Bar <b>motifs</b> are...important	<b>I</b> stumbled
The <b>project</b> focuses	Human <b>figures</b> are also found	<b>I</b> had
<b>Establishing</b> a framework was considered	<b>Sites</b> are...dominated	<b>I</b> would find
	The drawing <b>phase</b> follows	<b>We’ve</b> excavated
	<b>We</b> do not know	<b>Australopithecus</b> lived

Moreover, in *National Geographic*, the subject was often the author himself, and like the seminar presenter mentioned above, he crafted his piece as a narrative—this time, a narrative of discovery. The narrative form, generally considered the most natural and least demanding, seemed to balance the other demands made by the length and density of sentences.

The booklet was, perhaps, the best example of plain English, because it *was* plain, where the *National Geographic* piece was not. The booklet's authors made their findings more accessible by avoiding technical terminology, and by putting much of the information into visual form. They did not, however, use any of the devices that characterize a popularization, such as personalizing the writing, or recasting it as a narrative with animate subjects. Imagination plays no part in the writing. The result of this restraint—the authors describing mainly what was present at the sites, and much less often guessing what the occupants had done—is that the booklet comes across as scientific, and also somewhat sluggish.

I checked whether passive constructions were partly responsible for this sluggishness, but found active verbs in the majority. Even in these, however, there was often very little sense of activity, because they were not about actions, but natural processes:

The **deposits** *built up*....

**Conditions** *were getting* wetter....

**Pieces** of charcoal *may have fallen*...

The **climate** *started to improve*....

The **bedrock** *slopes*....

**Water** *dripped*....

When it comes to describing the archaeologists' work, the active verbs denote a little more activity, but only a little; and when the agents of these verbs are all inanimate, the overall effect is static.

The **survey** *conducted*...

**Work** *remains*....

**Archaeology** *provided*....

**this** *should provide*....

[the] **project** *focuses*...

The problem of sluggishness is combated, in *National Geographic*, by presenting an adventurous narrative of the scientists' and writers' experiences. As Gero and Root, who have studied the magazine's style, observe, "the archaeologists pictured in *National Geographic* exhibit extraordinary hyperactivity. Photographs depict archaeologists crawling, clambering, climbing, scaling, burrowing, swimming, diving, slinging sledgehammers, driving dog teams, and more, all in the direct line of duty" (1990, p. 27). We can compare the level of activity described by verbs like these with the likes of "slopes," "dripped," or "remains," in my list.

Gero and Root do not, however, endorse this strategy of foregrounding the adventures of the discoverer to make up for the inertia of what is discovered, for they point out that it makes for "an absurdly improbable dramatization of doing archaeology" (1990, p. 27). For this reason it would not be sensible to recommend to our students, as so many books on writing do, that they should always choose vivid, vigorous verbs; in the stakeholders' booklet, drama is eschewed in favor of a plain, accessible account.

The choice of active or passive verbs, and the length and complexity of sentences did not prove very good indicators of how direct, engaged, or vivid an impression the text would actually convey. This depended more on whether the author addressed the audience, and told them stories: narratives of discovery, of reasoning, or of the doings of animated beings in days gone by.

For scholars who are addressing non-specialist audiences, then, we were able to identify a range of ways in which they can make their presentations both easier to comprehend, and more engaging:

- A moderate degree of density in each sentence
- Avoidance, or else explanation of, technical terms
- Animate subjects, where possible, with verbs denoting activity, where possible
- Use of the first person



While some students will gather intuitively that writers and speakers make particular kinds of choices that maintain or close the distance between themselves and their audience, and between themselves and their subject matter, others may not realize that this is a matter of craft, and, as such, is something they can learn to control. Even when they do realize this, they still need to pinpoint what those choices are, and why they have the effects they have.

### **Conclusion**

For students whose writing has developed by adjusting to feedback on what teachers in their discipline approve of, it is important to focus more explicitly on audiences beyond the essay context: on who these audiences are, what they need, and what they are likely to appreciate. The situation of writing as an undergraduate is necessarily artificial, and the imagined audience for an essay – i.e., a reader in the discipline who knows less than the essay writer – does not actually exist. When a course provides opportunities to look beyond the essay genre, therefore, we should exploit these if we can. In this paper, I have shown how a focus on the craft of creating texts that work with different audiences can be introduced by discipline teachers or writing teachers, in just a few hours (our class takes 3), whether or not the students have had foundational instruction in writing.

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# **WAC and Faculty Development**

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# Reflection as Tension and Voice in Teaching Portfolios

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Marshall University's WAC program has from its outset employed teaching portfolios as the sole means of certifying faculty for teaching approved writing-intensive classes. Preparation for certification begins with attendance at a WAC workshop where participants undertake revision of one of their courses employing the principles of WAC and the requirements of the Marshall University WAC program (see Appendix 1, "Criteria for WAC Courses"). Shortly thereafter, participants begin teaching an experimental course during which they create teaching artifacts, record observations throughout the semester, and collect examples of student work, all of which will become essential components of their teaching portfolios.

Teaching portfolios, as applications for WAC certification, are used to document how teachers re-invent their courses to meet the minimum criteria for writing intensive courses. The WAC program provides, for applicants, specific instructions about how to develop a teaching portfolio. The body of the teaching portfolio consists of Sections A-C. Appendices (Section D) may be included for clarification. The requirements for each section are described below.

## A. Letter of Introduction

Crucial to this letter of introduction is a section titled "Reflections on Teaching," where applicants discuss the

changes they have made in their teaching as a result of the WAC workshop and what they learned during their experimental course. The letter of introduction also provides applicants with the opportunity to explain the nature of the course(s) involved, to describe distinctive characteristics of the target student population, to explain how and why the included artifacts were chosen, and to outline any deviations from the approved criteria. (The committee considers these on a case-by-case basis.)

B. Course Syllabi/Assignment Sheets

In this section, applicants include a copy of the syllabus for their experimental courses and selected documents relating to assignments. These selections should explain the objectives of the assignments, demonstrate the amount and type of writing required, provide evidence of opportunities for revision of written work, and specify how the writing done in the class contributes to the student's final grade in the course.

C. Examples of Instructions, Criteria (Rubrics), or Checklists

In this section, applicants include any documents that pertain to written assignments including, but not limited to, writing criteria (if separate from the assignment instructions), assignment rubrics or primary traits analyses, or assignment checklists.

D. Appendices

In this section, applicants include examples of student work, student evaluations of the writing experience, or any other documents the applicant thinks important to make the case for WAC certification.

As teachers develop their portfolios, they rely heavily upon the artifacts they select from their experimental WAC courses.

When teachers complete the workshop, they overhaul one of the courses they teach to include WAC strategies as an integral part of the course structure. To be approved, this overhaul must translate into clear, teachable objectives, assignments which teach and test these objectives, and fully integrated evaluation and assessment measures. Throughout their experimental courses, teachers begin the reflective process by recording their observations on both their methods and student progress and collecting assignment guidelines, writing criteria, and student work. From these artifacts teachers select evidence to support their application for certification (a teaching portfolio) and begin to reflect on themselves as teachers.

The certification process evolved as a faculty-driven initiative that immediately found strong administrative support. Early efforts to create a WAC program and community included the offering of workshops, each led by Barbara Walvoord, a pioneer in the field. She served as an important consultant as the newly formed WAC committee endeavored to institutionalize writing across the curriculum with a three-hour writing-intensive undergraduate requirement. Toward this goal, the committee examined numerous programs as models and decided to adopt a rigorous and highly reflective certification procedure culminating in the preparation of a teaching portfolio. Consulting existing pedagogical literature, the committee devised the certification process outlined above. In the spring of 1994, the faculty senate and president of the institution approved the WAC program for both faculty and students. Once faculty become certified, their ongoing relationship with the WAC program requires them to submit copies of course syllabi and to continue to gather artifacts of their teaching practice for ongoing reflection. Every two years, faculty members may re-certify by submitting, as an addendum to their original portfolio, a reflective piece showing recent changes in their teaching practices.

With substantial administrative backing, the WAC committee established several programmatic incentives to encourage

and support voluntary faculty participation. First, at the university's expense, the program offers the opportunity for faculty members to attend a two-day training retreat, held away from campus. Second, faculty members who complete this workshop are provided a \$100 book stipend through the campus bookstore. Once certified, faculty members teaching writing intensive courses may limit course size to 24 students. In addition, certified faculty members enjoy the professional prestige of being one of a small number of faculty on campus allowed to teach writing intensive courses. Finally, certification has become a recognized means to strengthen tenure and promotion applications.

### **Reflection as Tension and Voice**

Though information abounds from the approximately seventy teaching portfolios instructors have prepared (1994-2002), the WAC program is just now taking preliminary steps toward a thorough exploration of what these immensely valuable collections of teaching artifacts and teacher reflections reveal. The first step has been to try to understand the role which reflection plays in how teachers perceive themselves in the process of preparing a teaching portfolio. In 1996, the University WAC Committee undertook a series of interviews, seven of which form the basis for this essay, to cause teachers to reflect on how the process of creating a portfolio affected their perceptions of their teaching. The administrative assistant of the WAC program (M.A. English Composition) conducted almost all of the interviews, and the program director and administrative assistant selected the issues to be discussed in the interviews (see the Appendix for interview questions). Issues ranged from troubling anxieties to unexpected discoveries voiced by WAC faculty and were gathered from a variety of settings, such as formal WAC committee meetings, one-on-one discussions in the hallways, and lunch bag workshops. Teachers were chosen, representing as wide a variety of academic disciplines as possible, on the

basis of the thoroughness and hard work they had put into the portfolio creation process.

These interviews show that the preparation of teaching portfolios in a setting where certification is the end goal creates two sets of important and sometimes fructifying tensions. These tensions bring their creators into clear focus as teachers. The first tension, one often discussed in teaching portfolio literature, is opposition between the summative (outward) purpose for which the instructor prepares a teaching portfolio, WAC certification, and the formative (inward) effect that preparation has on teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and teaching (Hurst, Wilson, and Cramer 583-584; Doolittle 3; Keig and Waggoner 3-4; Murray 38; Ferraro pars. 9-10; Seng and Seng 2). The second tension occurs on a social register: the creation of the portfolio is an individual activity, yet it is predicated by, derived from, and constantly influenced by the group activities of WAC teachers who regularly share their problems, solutions, and strategies with one another and reflect both publicly and privately about their teaching.

Discussing the relationship between portfolios and reflection, Sandra Murphy argues that "portfolios have an audience; so does reflection" (8). This assertion speaks to the social-register tension evidenced when portfolios are created for the purposes of certification. Portfolios assume both a private, or individual, and public, or social, importance. The interviews reveal important clues to how teachers resolve this tension by recognizing that the portfolio is one step among many in the process of becoming certified. That is, throughout the portfolio development process, these teachers remain cognizant of the broader community within which they work as individuals.

As expected, the teachers interviewed discuss the individual nature of their portfolio development. One teacher describes his individual time as a way to "organize my own thoughts and my materials." During this individual work, teachers examine, consider, and sort the documents (such as course syllabi, assign-



ment instructions, checklists, samples of student work) they have collected while teaching their experimental courses.

What is unexpected is the extent to which these teachers rely on social interaction with the WAC community to complete uniquely individual pieces of work. The influence of the WAC community helps these teachers gain access to the WAC community, stay within the WAC community, complete a successful portfolio, and achieve closure on the portfolio development process. Almost all of the teachers interviewed expressed difficulty in separating the insights gained specifically from the creation of a portfolio from what they had gained by participating in all aspects of the WAC program. One teacher, when asked what insights she had gained about teaching, learning, writing, and herself as a teacher, explained, "I wouldn't say the portfolio did any of that. I think the WAC program did...being introduced to the ideas and trying to think about...my own teaching...that's what had the biggest impact on me. I see the portfolio...as simply the artifact of that." For her, the portfolio serves as a means of communicating with and speaking to the WAC community. It elevates her private reflections to a social act. As an artifact, her portfolio represents who she is as a teacher and provides a way to introduce herself to the WAC community. As a social act, her portfolio is the means by which she will gain access to that community.

Other teachers talk about the ways in which the community provides a structure, or frame, through which they examine their own work. One teacher describes this function of the community:

WAC...gave me a framework within which to keep working.... I found a way into a group of faculty on this campus that were also concerned about the same issues.... In the WAC community, you get to see all these good things; you get to hear all these good things people are doing...you are around people who care about teaching...so it helps you.

From this perspective, the WAC community provides this teacher with a cohort of teachers with similar interests, specifically faculty who are interested in improving and examining their teaching practices. For him, completing a portfolio serves as a way to stay within the WAC community, a place he clearly views as positive to his professional development.

In addition to the community functions already described, other interviews reveal how critical social interactions can be during portfolio development. This support is most clearly demonstrated by one teacher who described the way she completed her portfolio by engaging in social exchanges from the beginning to the end of the process. She confided her difficulty in getting started, characterizing the beginning of the process as one of “whining” and “complaining.” She used social interaction, specifically dialogue, to move herself past this negative phase. To do this, she joined forces with another individual from a different department who was also completing a portfolio and together they began a dialogue. She explains, “We did a lot of talking...informal talking...and we simply worked out a way to do it, and sort of short-circuited the whining and complaining stage.”

Now able to get started, this teacher and her dialogue partner continued their conversations as they selected and organized their supporting materials and wrote their cover letters. During her interview, she drew connections between how they talked and what they wrote. She describes their conversations in this way:

One of the things about James’ and my partnership that works is I spill out this torrent of words all the time, and James almost seems to stutter at times, and is very slow, except when we start working together. I’ve learned to get more silent and slower, and he learns to get faster and smoother in what it is that he’s saying.

This quiet slowing down for her and the fluent speeding up for him enabled each of them to compose reflective and

meaningful cover letters. Without these conversations, this teacher believes her own cover letter would be nothing more than a “torrent of words.”

With her cover letter complete, this teacher once again turned to social interactions, this time to assure herself of the quality of her work. Now, she joined forces with three different teachers, peers within her own department, and organized a “little, informal group to read it [her portfolio], to talk about what was clear, and what wasn’t clear, things that they had questions about.” In turn, she read and responded to the portfolios of the other members of this informal group. Having peers respond to her work was useful and proved to be a strategy employed by a number of the other teachers interviewed. Peer response, for these teachers, became another way of converting the individual and private act of developing a portfolio into a social and public act.

The final influence of the WAC community appears in the suggestions made by several of the teachers to require, or at least provide for, a final chance to talk with someone in the WAC community about their portfolios. They express their interest in this kind of interaction in strong and certain terms. One teacher explains that she has “all these things in one place [the portfolio]” but that “something seemed to be missing.” She continues, “Most teaching is done in such isolation....I had put a lot of time and work into it [the portfolio]. I...wanted to dialogue with somebody...I felt something was missing there.” Another teacher muses, “What would be...nice is somewhere along the line to have a one-on-one meeting with someone on that WAC committee who’s read your portfolio...a little conference just to sit and talk about it.” In these comments, the social aspect of the individual act of creating a portfolio comes full circle. In order to achieve closure on their portfolios, these teachers want to begin their experience as certified WAC instructors with a conversation about their work and their portfolio with the community that influenced both of those things.

The tension that these teachers feel between their individual and social acts of preparing portfolios clearly pivots on reflection. Likewise, the tension they feel between summative and formative reasons for completing teaching portfolios also evidences reliance on written reflection as a means of both understanding and making change. In other words, teachers had more than one reason for preparing teaching portfolios: some desired solely to gain WAC-certified status by having their portfolios judged acceptable according to carefully articulated rubrics by a committee (summative); others, though interested in WAC certification, also were seeking a means of achieving self-awareness and self-assessment (formative). But whatever their reasons, their individual processes of creating the portfolio involve and value written reflection as both a means and a goal.

To understand how and why this written reflection operates in the creation process of teaching portfolios, the categories of reflection outlined respectively by Mezirow and Kember become crucial; both posit degrees of reflection as based on the content and nature of the reflection itself (Mezirow 107; Kember 19). At the beginning level, **content reflection** examines **what** “we perceive, think, feel or act upon” (Mezirow 107). This kind of reflection occurs in all kinds of portfolio development, summative and formative. Whether motivated by certification or self-awareness, teachers also often exhibit **process reflection** in which they explore the method and manner in which they think as teachers: they examine “**how** [they] perform the functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting” as well as evaluating to what degree they are successful in performing these functions (Mezirow 107-108). The highest level of reflection teachers demonstrate is **premise reflection**. This is when they examine critically the underlying **assumptions** and presuppositions in their teaching which form the basis of successful or unsuccessful teaching practices. At this point, they may change their teaching practices by altering their underlying assumptions. Through this process, they reconstitute both their teaching val-

ues and their teaching strategies.

The perceptions Marshall faculty have of themselves as teachers, therefore, are predicated on two important things: the personal, individual goal they have for their creation of a teaching portfolio, that is, the degree to which they subscribe to a summative or formative purpose, and the nature and depth of personal written reflection that they see as important in their portfolios. What is keenly instructive about the interviews is that teachers at both poles of the summative-formative tension use certain metaphors for the teaching portfolio which encapsulate the insightful connections they are making through written reflection.

For example, at the summative end of the tension, one instructor, Mark, used the metaphor “promotion and tenure application” as a way of understanding what he was committed to in the preparation of a teaching portfolio. Mark put much emphasis in the interview on the required materials and sections of the portfolio that the WAC committee would be evaluating. Clearly, he engaged in certain kinds of reflection, primarily content and process reflection in Mezirowian terms. He had to determine whether the artifacts he had assembled were, in fact, the artifacts the committee expected to see and whether his evaluation of them (a reflection on how he performed) would match what he thought the committee would look for in his portfolio. A deep kind of reflection, involving an examination of his teaching presuppositions and assumptions, was accidental rather than deliberate, if it occurred at all. Mark says he now realizes that he missed an opportunity to examine himself carefully as a teacher:

The next time around, I think I would be more ... personally reflective on the changes that I actually went through ... some people were very personal ... I feel uncomfortable doing that. But ... after looking at some of them, I thought they revealed a lot, and I think if I were to go back, I probably would be a little more per-

sonal—just a sharing of, you know, what I went through and all, and the changes that were brought about.

Keeping separate the professional and the personal—an important guideline for academic professional behavior—was essential for Mark because he saw the activity of creating a teaching portfolio as essentially summative. What he might have learned about himself only became clear by reading others' portfolios, and the contrast pointed up unrealized opportunities for premise reflection that could have led to constructive change. Since Marshall requires a teaching portfolio, some teachers will go through that process not with the benefits of the process in mind, but, like jumping a hurdle in a race, to do whatever is necessary to get themselves to the winner's block. At the same time, the requirements placed on them force a kind of written reflection that does have some residual effect, even if, as in Mark's case, the only result is an awareness of what gifts deeper reflection might bestow.

Another teacher, Robert, uses a similar metaphor, "the seal of approval." Robert, however, also emphasizes a special kind of ordering of teaching artifacts that results in reflection: the teaching portfolio offers a "place to put things in a nice order." Considering these two metaphors together, since they belong to a single teacher's way of looking at himself, reveals yet another facet of written reflection in portfolios. While calling a teaching portfolio a seal of approval points inevitably toward the summative goal which this teacher acknowledges as primary, at the same time the second metaphor points out the messiness of teaching, which obscures any immediate vision of what is being done: the untidiness of unending talk between teacher and students, as well as the never-ending trail of paper from assignment guidelines to handouts to drafts coming back from students to polished, finished products. Evaluative thinking and writing and the physical arranging of artifacts are important reflective actions to establish order from the normal chaos of teaching, and that order is important to the teacher who creates

it. It allows both content (what) and process (how) reflection. Also, newly established order encourages the beginnings of premise reflection. Seeing an order where none existed before prompts the viewer to contemplate and evaluate teaching pre-suppositions and philosophical issues that can now be detected. The process, then, of selecting and linking, either correlatively or subordinately, pieces of teaching debris can open the way toward a deeper evaluation of underlying assumptions (premise reflection).

Teachers working at the formative end of this tension demonstrate the same interest in the effects of reflection, only to a greater degree. From interviews with two of these teachers, this deeper reflection comes as a result of a deliberate goal and a deliberate process of reflection. For instance, one teacher, Emma, understood the reflective process of creating a teaching portfolio to be twofold: an initial “spill-your-guts kind of dump reflection” and about a week later a “critical reflection.” First she “gathered all [her] thoughts in the same basket” so that as a subsequent step in reflection, she could look critically at everything written down and make evaluative choices, organize, and discard unneeded observations. During the dormant period, her “dump reflection”—a most interesting metaphor for a teaching portfolio—became a physical phenomenon in her external world, as well as her mind, so that when she returned to it she could see it in a new way. For Emma this distancing was crucial:

It afforded me the opportunity to look at each course specifically from a distance. I do a lot of daily reflection and periodic reflection as I complete an assignment or start an assignment and I always make notes . . . . But I’m always in the situation at the time. And I’m not always certain that I’m making good decisions then. And so the portfolio really made me just step away from it. I wasn’t doing that for the next class. I was looking at it for a different reason, and I think that’s why it was so helpful.

The new perspective provided by both the process of creating a portfolio and the wait period in her process inspired premise reflection, an examining of assumptions underlying her teaching practices. In her final remarks about the process and results of the portfolio, a kind of humility was apparent. Emma clearly understood her mistaken suppositions which had led to less than desirable student learning outcomes. As she put it, “Well, I think that I discovered how very little I knew about teaching, how very little I knew about learning, and in the process of discovering that I learned something about teaching and learning. And I’m not certain I ever would have discovered that [otherwise].” Emma has clearly observed the difference between on-the-spot reflections about class experiences and the critical evaluation through writing about these same experiences after they are over and she has extricated herself from all of the mental struggles that occupy her within the immediate teaching situation. Through the distancing of the teaching portfolio, premise reflection leads to change.

The second teacher, Ruth, also values the distancing phenomenon so vital to teaching portfolios, but she used the terms “metatexting” and “metacognitive writing” (borrowed from Elbow) when talking about it. She was referring to the kind of evaluation of her work that comes from careful and deliberate reflection, the kind of self-assessment that answers the important question of how the process which created that work is connected with the qualities of that work. She sees the results of creating portfolios as similar for both students and teachers: a kind of premise reflection which gives space and perspective for change. For Ruth, the kind of premise reflection that leads to change has to be systematic:

It’s the ability to systematically reflect, and the emphasis becomes on the system, on the whole... how this card is interconnected with the other cards and whether or not that interconnection is working, and it’s being systematic. Having a very particular kind of structure is



important, and I think that actually works with student portfolios because they get a sense of themselves, and this takes time also to develop.

The usefulness of this kind of reflection for her teaching became clear when Ruth refused to allow her portfolio to reside in the WAC office, insisting that she needed it for her continuing reevaluation of her teaching. She emphasizes the need she had for keeping the portfolio present with her when she talks of the “memorability” which a portfolio offers:

One of the things that’s most meaningful about the portfolio to me is its memorability. I use it in so many ways. I use it as an example that students could look at to see how to put one together, but it actually represents a form of thinking about my classes that is gradually becoming outdated because it’s changing. I think it is changing from what I had there, but the presence of that object there, that thing there gives me always something to contrast with: ‘Well, when I did that, I thought [pause] Now I think [pause] and I can see that actually I was probably moving in that direction all along.’

The changes that she made as a teacher, her reemerging as a different teacher, can only be ascertained and proved by the physical existence of the teaching portfolio because it recorded and verified in a past time certain presuppositions supporting certain teaching practices, both of which have now metamorphosed into new assumptions and strategies. The slow transformations of self-reflecting teachers can be gauged successfully by creating a teaching portfolio.

One of the most profound insights that one of our teachers provided is this: “The thing I love about these portfolios are the distant voices, and you could just hear the people’s spirits and minds talking.” For her, teaching portfolios are the truest representation of teachers, and the reflections they contain represent the conversations between the mind and the spirit. In this public and private talk within teaching portfolios, the teach-

ers in the WAC community perceive themselves more clearly as teachers. But the voices she heard were distant. Why? It may be that they were distant because they came through the many shapes of reflection. By the very act of distancing themselves from their work, teachers create voices they do not know they have, giving them the means and opportunity to transform themselves.

### **Our Own Reflections**

We (Karen and Charles) now arrive at a new juncture in Marshall's WAC program, a place where our own reflective process guides us. We are aware that after eight years of continuous WAC training workshops (two per year), there is a diminishing number of regular full-time faculty members attending WAC training, and the number of WAC-trained faculty is four times the number of certified faculty. An informal survey of WAC-trained faculty who did not pursue certification revealed that the majority of them identified lack of time as the primary reason for postponing the development of a teaching portfolio. For the past two years, therefore, we have tried a new pattern of one fall training workshop, populated mostly by new or recent hires, and one spring portfolio development workshop. Though the average attendance of the latter workshop has been relatively small, virtually all attendees complete teaching portfolios, some after experimenting with WAC techniques for as many as six years. The longitudinal reflection, which occurs at these portfolio development workshops, provides the most solid support for faculty we can offer in the process of developing a teaching portfolio. The profound kind of reflection that makes its way into these new portfolios continues to be a source of wonder and inspiration.

The reflections contained in this article, however, portray faculty members who created the first portfolios developed in the program, and as we wrote about them, we realized that an important transformation has come about which results from

two related processes involving reflection. First, we noticed that the caliber of participants in the workshops had changed: faculty new to the Marshall campus, now making up most of the training workshops, were much more enthusiastic about WAC and already in tune to the need for and rewards of reflective teaching practice. This new composition of the workshop revolutionized the discussion and the application of WAC principles to the revamping of courses (the center of our WAC training) and allowed for much greater progress both in self-examination and in the preparation of teaching materials.

Only later did we come to understand that this process was connected with another, more complicated one that points to the heart of what our WAC program is all about. For the first six or seven years after the preparation of teaching portfolios became the benchmark for WAC approval, we were constantly aware of a fairly open hostility which more seasoned faculty were expressing in the presence of recent hires and others who placed a value on pedagogy. Evidence for this hostility filtered back to us through informal lunches with WAC faculty and our friends across campus. We realized that no matter what we did, two major perceptions were that the WAC program was elitist since it had a tangible benchmark for approval, and that preparing a teaching portfolio was not a worthwhile expenditure of faculty time and effort. We suspected that at some level these faculty members realized that the process actually required a careful consideration of (that is, reflection on) their own teaching practices and who they were as teachers, and that there might be fear at the bottom of their criticism. This undercurrent was impossible to address directly and counteract successfully. But merely by continuing to train faculty and certify those who prepared teaching portfolios, we gradually changed the environment until the nay-saying ceased.

The perception of teacher portfolio preparation is now being formed by the reflective experience itself rather than by the attitudes of those who do not care to take part. Were we to update this study with a new set of interviews, the depth of the

reflection itself would paint a very different picture of Marshall's WAC program, one which has reflective practice much more as its ultimate and shared foundation.

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## Appendix 1

### Criteria for WAC Courses

Writing Intensive courses at Marshall University are offered by faculty members who have been certified by the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. These writing intensive courses must:

1. Integrate carefully planned writing assignments into the course so that they increase student learning and enhance student ability to write.
2. List the improvement of student writing among the course objectives in the syllabus.
3. Distribute specific written instructions, including criteria for evaluation, for major assignments.
4. Guide students in conceiving, organizing, and presenting written material in ways appropriate to the subject being studied.
5. Require revision of at least one writing assignment after receiving response from the professor.
6. Include, with whatever informal or draft writing is appropriate, at least one assignment that requires students to produce finished, edited prose.
7. Consider written assignments as a major part of the final grade; in most cases, this needs to be 50 percent or more.

8. Distribute writing for the course through the semester rather than concentrated at the end. (NOTE: Writing here may mean research prospectuses, multiple drafts, or progress reports, etc., of the single course project or multiple course assignments.)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Why did you decide to undertake the task of completing a portfolio and become a WAC professor?
2. Describe the process you used in completing your portfolio.
3. Describe how you would change your approach to the task if you were to start again putting together a portfolio.
4. How do you feel the process you used in putting together a portfolio parallels the processes involved in completing writing assignments in your WAC classes?
5. Do you feel you learned certain things during the actual process of completing a portfolio and then, later, gained additional insights on looking back at the experience once the portfolio was complete?
6. What would you consider the most challenging problem connected with the task of completing your portfolio?
7. What was the most rewarding experience connected with the task of completing the portfolio?
8. What did you realize you might want to revise, either modify or abandon somehow as you worked on the portfolio?
9. How much has your teaching changed? How the nature of your course design or assignments and how class time is spent since you completed the portfolio?
10. What insights about teaching, learning, writing, and yourself as a teacher did you gain through the process of completing the portfolio?
11. What changes in the process or requirements for the portfolio would make the experience of completing a portfolio more beneficial?

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# **WAC Program Strategies**

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# A Reflective Strategy for Writing Across the Curriculum: Situating WAC as a Moral and Civic Duty

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*St. Norbert College*

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Two recent books on writing across the curriculum—*The WAC Casebook: Scenes for Faculty Reflection and Program Development* and *WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Programs*—provide two operative words that are vital to any discussion of WAC: “reflection” and “strategy.” As Chris Anson contends, “We do not always find opportunities to reflect on the teaching process, even though it makes up an important part of our professional lives [...] But such investigations work most successfully when they become public—when we talk about our teaching, share ideas, and solve problems with our colleagues” (xii). To reflect upon WAC now is timely, especially if we heed the advice of Susan McLeod and Eric Miraglia, who argue in *WAC for the New Millennium*, that “higher education is facing massive change in the next few decades, which could spell trouble for WAC programs” (1). A reflection on WAC, consequently, becomes dependent on particular strategies to keep the movement vital for the future. At St. Norbert College, a Catholic, liberal arts college of 2000 students in Wisconsin, we have developed a WAC program that complements our mission to provide for a values-centered curriculum. Our program, which situates writing as a moral and civic responsibility, has been a key factor in gaining both ad-



ministrative and wider faculty support for WAC, resulting in a reaffirming and reforming of the program at both the macro and micro levels. By reflecting on writing as a moral and civic duty, we have developed concrete writing and administrative strategies that can become the foundation for reform of WAC in any college or university setting.

In an important article in *College English*—"The Future of WAC"—Barbara Walvoord examines the various challenges that WAC will have to meet in its latest stage if it will continue to be a viable method for teaching writing in college and university settings. She contends that "WAC must act now as a mature reform organization" (74) which pays particular attention to macro- (administrative) and micro- (pedagogical) level challenges. Current debates surrounding WAC often focus on assessing its feasibility—whether it "works" on both pedagogical and administrative levels. For colleges and universities, the consequent reassessment of WAC may conflict with a program's attempt to take root on a campus, due in part to tough budgetary constraints and the reactionary impulse to return to the "Golden Age" of the 3 R's, which essentially translates into a return to conventional basic English composition courses. In the Foreword to *WAC for the New Millennium*, Elaine Maimon accurately suggests that "like every educational reform movement, WAC has developed within the paradox of the academy, the simultaneous commitment to conservatism (the preservation of knowledge) and to radicalism (the generation of new knowledge). WAC's staying power as an educational reform movement is based on its resilience in resolving paradox" (vii). WAC's responses to these challenges—this ultimate paradox—has been a continual move to redefine and situate itself on campuses. Now, as Walvoord advocates, WAC needs to become more pronounced as a reform movement. WAC can and should respond to Walvoord's call for reform and in doing so address the perennial challenges that confront it. After all, WAC is simultaneously a radical and conservative movement: it returns to the basic

emphasis on writing, while persuading (especially to uninitiated) teachers, students, and administrators that a WAC approach to teaching writing is valuable and essential.

One way to address both administrative and pedagogical concerns is to view WAC from an ethical perspective, to argue that learning to write is a moral and civic duty that is central to higher education. It follows, then, that the teaching of writing is also such a duty. In “Conceptualizing Writing as Moral and Civic Thinking,” Sandra Stotsky argues that “ethical, or principled, thinking across a broad spectrum of moral concerns is fundamental to academic ways of knowing” (794). “Indeed,” suggests Stotsky, “if teachers consciously conceptualize academic writing as a moral as well as cognitive (and affective) phenomenon, their students can probably best develop the habits of responsible thinking while they are learning how to do research and to write for academic purposes” (806). Stotsky’s thesis applies broadly to WAC; indeed, a moral and civic-minded perspective on writing provides a foundation for WAC. Stotsky’s ethical perspective clearly views writing as an integral academic methodology and thereby can nudge teachers across the curriculum to uphold their responsibility to guide students in their moral and civic duties as they write. In a sense, this moral and civic focus can revitalize and reinvigorate—shall we say reform?—the teaching of writing across the disciplines. While affirming the importance of WAC pedagogically, conceiving writing as moral and civic duty justifies administrative costs, for it is hard to argue against both sound pedagogy and morality. Consequently, WAC becomes integral to the educational process.<sup>1</sup>

Walvoord’s theory that WAC must define itself as a reform movement, and Stotsky’s premise that writing is a moral and civic duty, are operative in the WAC program at St. Norbert College. Our college’s WAC program creates an *ethical space* that complements the college’s mission, which leads to a *writing space* on campus that houses instructors from across the disciplines, merging micro and macro concerns. Situating WAC in

an *ethical space*, we will suggest, can be an important foundation for programs at other institutions, for ethical and moral concerns are integral to the mission of any college or university.

### **A Brief Institutional History**

The development of the St. Norbert College writing program into a *bona fide* WAC program, and one central to the curriculum, coincides with the gradual clarification of the college's commitment to focus on values (Stotsky's moral and civic responsibility) in all of its classes. This awakening—actually re-awakening—to an explicitly values-oriented education occurred in the early 1970s. A survey of the faculty, students, administrators, and alumni disclosed a clear consensus of opinion on items considered most important to a definition of St. Norbert College: liberal arts tradition; self-educating students; Catholic affiliation; values-oriented classrooms.

At the same time, the faculty were addressing the issue concerning *who* should teach writing, little suspecting that the issues of a values-oriented education and the teaching of writing were related. The faculty voted to drop the freshman composition requirement in favor of courses in any discipline designated as “verbal skills.” In the late 1970s, with the arrival of a new academic dean, came a thorough revision of the general education core. One of the results was that in the 1980s, writing became still more prominent. Verbal skills courses were now chosen from courses in the general education core at both the lower (first-year and sophomore) and upper (junior and senior) bienniums. The institutional foundation was in place for WAC.

Two key developments occurred in the 1990s. The first was the renovation of the writing center, which became a place for tutoring as an important stage in the process of writing an essay, rather than primarily a remedial center for under-prepared writers. The second, and more far-reaching, undertaking was the complete revision—Walvoord's term “reformation” applies—of

the writing policy and practices. This task took two years to complete and resulted in a faculty-endorsed WAC model that is published in the college's *General Education Handbook* and college catalog (available through the SNC website). This model, based on process writing and writing-to-learn pedagogies, includes specified Writing Intensive (WI) courses and establishes writing expectations for the major disciplines or discourse communities. The revised program thus promotes writing in all disciplines as an integral part of a liberal arts education; it also emphasizes that different disciplines have particular methodologies and writing conventions. These revisions were not new, of course, but the systematic application of them, at St. Norbert at least, was *evolutionary*.

What was *revolutionary* at St. Norbert in both concept and in practice—and indebted in considerable measure to Stotsky's argument—was that the revised program placed writing within a moral framework, tying it even more closely to the mission and identity of the college, further affirming the principle of WAC. The mission of WAC was designed specifically to enhance the mission of the college.

To give an example, the *St Norbert College Catalog* defines its educational philosophy as follows: “to provide a superior education that is personally, intellectually, and spiritually/morally challenging” (10). Furthermore, as a liberal arts college, its goal is to offer “an education that provides all our students with the broad knowledge, skills and experiences to live in a complex world, and an on-going commitment to enhancing our traditional strength in the liberal arts and sciences” (10). As a Catholic college, it subscribes to “the philosophy that all human activity is essentially related to human values and, therefore, it urges that this be reflected in every discipline taught” (15). Such catalog rhetoric is familiar to most of us, and we may smile ironically when we read those idealistic goals. Quite frankly, these lofty claims sometimes go unfulfilled for want of concrete and practical ways of implementing them. WAC, how-

ever, situated as a moral and civic duty provides a way of making writing, potentially, central to the entire educational enterprise and a concrete manifestation of a school's mission. Stotsky's view of writing as a moral and intellectual behavior in all disciplines or discourse communities has helped the faculty make the connection between the teaching of writing and the discussion of moral values in *all* classes.

### **WAC as a Moral and Civic Duty at St. Norbert College: A Sample Design**

To provide the ethical framework for our WAC program, we began by modifying Stotsky's "Categorization of the Academic Writer's Responsibilities," which provides the ethical framework to the program by focusing on the *respect* writers need to be concerned with as they engage in the writing process. St. Norbert's "General Writing Policy" section of its WAC program begins with a general introduction to the writing process and then situates this process into an ethical framework:

#### **Respect for the Subject**

*Students should engage the course material on an intellectual level, demonstrating a respect for the integrity of subject material. Thus written work must reflect that respect for the subject by displaying that the writer has honestly and sensitively explored the subject and presented it in an intelligent and well-organized form. Such respect also means that students will be careful not to plagiarize.*

#### **Respect for the Reader**

*Students should demonstrate that they respect the values and concerns of their readers. Thus written work should address the needs of its audience, which includes an intelligent, coherent, and grammatically correct presentation of information; a use of unbiased language to avoid sexist or other pejorative rhetoric; and an awareness and tolerance*

*of alternative viewpoints.*

### **Respect for Language**

*Students should join the discourse community of the course and present written work that reflects an understanding of and respect for the conventions of that community. Thus written work should use the proper language (or terminology) of the course, the proper format, and the proper documentation style.*

### **Respect for Fellow Students**

*Students should respect their fellow students as writers. Thus students have an obligation to turn in their assignments on time (since instructors often respond to essays only after all are submitted), to keep library sources available to classmates, to respond constructively to fellow students' written drafts when working collaboratively, and to turn in only original written work.*

### **Respect for Self**

*Students should take pride in and ownership of their writing. They will assume personal responsibility for all elements of their written work. (St. Norbert College 2001-2003 Catalog 74-75)*

Though the listing of “respects” is cast as responsibilities that students must meet in their writing, the clear implication is that instructors will guide students directly in the ethical obligations of being a writer in the academic setting, which will extend to writing in the workaday world. Thus the ethical framework is an overarching statement that allows for a philosophical discussion about writing and its conventions across the disciplines, as the following selected examples illustrate. “Respect for the Subject” leads to a discussion of what it means to maintain the “integrity of subject matter,” while it allows for the prac-

tical discussion of plagiarism that is best discussed from a disciplinary perspective. While discussing the “Respect for the Reader” and “Respect for Language” sections, instructor and students would be concerned about the importance of audience generally and the specific disciplinary audience that is tied in with the discourse conventions of that particular community. As Robert Jones and Joseph J. Comprone stress in “Where Do We Go Next in Writing Across the Curriculum,” WAC

must work toward balancing humanistic methods of encouraging more active and collaborative learning in WAC courses with reinforcing the ways of knowing and the writing conventions of different discourse communities. In other words, teaching and research need to be combined in a way that encourages joining conventional knowledge and rhetorical acumen. Only then will students know enough to negotiate between the constraints of different fields and the self-imposed needs of their individual intentions. (61)

By focusing on the ethical concerns involved in writing in a discipline, the instructor and students do indeed negotiate about writing conventions and the ethical repercussions of writing. To restate briefly, the ethical dimension to WAC becomes integral to the pedagogical concerns of teaching writing generally and specifically within disciplines.

### **Implications of WAC as a Moral and Civic Duty: Other Colleges and Universities**

WAC is robust at St. Norbert College, thanks in part to our adapting of Stotsky’s emphasis on morality and writing that has led to macro-level reform. Surely any liberal arts institution or any institution with a religious affiliation will be responsive to the notion of writing as a moral and civic responsibility. But religious and liberal arts colleges do not have a corner on values. When Stotsky calls writing a moral phenomenon, she does not mean that such is the case only at religious liberal arts

schools. Stotsky's phenomenon applies to all institutions of higher learning.

The general benefits of an ethical space for WAC at any institution are fourfold:

1. It can convince faculty members that they should share in the teaching of writing since each discipline—as well as each individual member of a discipline—is concerned with the ethical obligations of its practitioners.
2. It can persuade students that writing is fundamental to all disciplines, especially when writing is seen as both a product and a process that involves moral responsibility.
3. It should improve students' writing ability across the curriculum as they strive to become better thinkers and writers in their discourse communities, with the guidance of instructors.
4. It should justify WAC to the faculty and administration in terms of pedagogical and administrative costs. Some costs, of course, are monetary, and WAC can be an expensive endeavor when class size is reduced across the curriculum to account for writing, not to mention administrative costs of a WAC program that will include training, assessment, and so forth. But there are other costs as well: the cost faculty may feel when they pare down content in order to allow for writing instruction, or the cost for faculty as they spend more time responding to writing.

How, then, can other institutions employ the philosophy of WAC as a moral and civic duty? The following three steps, based on the St. Norbert experience, seem fundamental to this application:

1. In accord with Walvoord's advocacy of macro-level reform, an institution's writing program should be defined concretely in terms of the college's or university's mission statement. It must be central to the educational focus of the school, a part of its institutional identity.
2. The case for the inclusion of writing in the institution's mis-



sion statement can be made based on the recognition that writing is not only an intellectual but also a moral behavior and one of the best ways to engage students in the examination of moral values. As such, writing should be a central concern of any college or university. As Stotsky posits: “Indeed, it is possible that learning to understand and observe the obligations embedded in academic writing may contribute more to the development of a student’s moral character as a citizen than discussions of the teacher’s personal values and the moral meaning of historical events, contemporary public issues, fictional dilemmas, or applied science and technology” (798-99). And, as Stotsky further suggests, the moral principles involved in writing “can be taught without indoctrinating students”; these principles “can be developed in a multi-religious society without recourse to specific religious values” (806).

3. Writing, considered as a way of teaching moral and civic duty, logically stretches across disciplinary lines and in fact includes all disciplines, thus promoting WAC in two ways. First, all disciplines should share the responsibility for teaching writing since writing in any discipline is an important way to teach students to reflect on their moral and civic responsibilities in general. Second, each discipline needs to teach writing in its own discourse community, not just for the practical purpose of introducing students to particular writing conventions or styles, but also to involve them in a sophisticated manner in the ethical concerns that arise within that particular subject. Instructors, one hopes, would wish to promote morally responsible conduct in their fields of study.

Furthermore, an ethical focus on WAC can aid in both the developing and sustaining of WAC. As Eric Miraglia and Susan H. McLeod report in *Writing Program Administration*, “WAC programs are still being born and the landscape continues to be dynamic” (46) because WAC “seems to be attaching itself to (or becoming part of, or working in tandem with) other educational

movements as they come along—critical thinking, freshman seminars, learning communities, computers across the curriculum” (57). And may we add *ethics across the curriculum*? Miraglia and McLeod conclude that “three compelling and related factors [. . .] contribute to the long-term endurance of WAC programs”: administrative support philosophically and financially, “grassroots/faculty support,” and “strong, consistent program leadership” (48). Jones and Comprone contend that “one of the reasons WAC has yet to establish any permanent presence in universities is its failure to coordinate the administrative, pedagogical, and research aspects of its program” (61). A WAC program centered around ethical concerns, as we have argued, can certainly address positively Miraglia and McLeod’s compelling factors as well as Jones and Comprone’s call for coordination.

Defining WAC as a moral and civic duty, of course, can itself become mere catalog rhetoric. Such a reform philosophy is a guiding philosophical principle, but does not necessarily guarantee that WAC will be self-sustaining and fruitful. Like any WAC program, St Norbert’s needs much nurturing, lots of faculty training, writing center tutor training, budgetary discussions with the administration, a continual concentration on program assessment, and so forth. But the most important implication may be that by fusing the macro with the micro issues, we have situated WAC firmly within the college’s identity. The college now pays attention to WAC because it defines who and what we are. Our President and Academic Dean, believe it or not, often use WAC as a “marketing tool” to attract students to our campus, especially since *U.S. News and World Report’s America’s Best Colleges* (2003 edition) has a separate listing for schools embracing “writing in the disciplines” where “programs typically make the writing process a priority at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum” (114). It is hard to wince at such marketing moves when writing is involved in this way! Barbara Walvoord claims that “WAC must act now as a mature

reform organization [. . .] needing to reinterpret, to dive in, to take its place in what history may call the era of teaching, the era of education reform; must work to refine and reshape its goals and to move skillfully, powerfully [. . .] among the complex forces and discourses of the academy” (74). And Miraglia and McLeod argue that WAC is shape-shifting “into a new form of what WAC has been all along—a renewed emphasis on undergraduate teaching and learning in higher education” (58). A moral base to WAC may be considered one of those new forms.

This article began by claiming that WAC needs to reflect and strategize to ensure its viability. While WAC programs by nature deal with the nuts-and-bolts of the present, they by necessity must project a vision for the future if they are to be useful. Situating writing as a moral and civic duty can provide an unshakeable foundation for future growth and evolution of a college’s curriculum on the macro and micro levels. On the macro level, for example, the movement to incorporate service-learning opportunities into the curriculum can be enhanced by a civic-based WAC program, for what can be more instrumental to public service than having citizens who can clearly articulate themselves in writing that has at its heart an ethical dimension? WAC in this light can be a powerful ally to outcome-based assessment. On the micro-level, such a WAC program can introduce critical discussion about the complex issues related to intentional and unintentional plagiarism. WAC programs must be elastic while being realistic in their goals. And these programs should be based on reflective strategies that provide a sound foundation for writing that is integral to the mission of any institution of higher learning. Any WAC program may want to consider centering itself in terms of such moral and civic duty.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> The terms *moral* and *ethical*, we understand, are highly charged words. For this essay, we use *moral* and *ethical* inter-

changeably to denote, as Stotsky defines, “the various principles, or ethical constraints, entailed by academic research and writing” (795), which help “students understand that many, if not most, of the intellectual standards they are expected to meet in their writing should also be seen as ethical responsibilities to their readers” (799). *Moral* and *ethical* are further defined in St. Norbert’s mission statement, where moral and ethical development of students encourages them “to come to grips with cultural and societal change so as to confront, to shape and to grow with the future” (12) and “to clarify their own values and embrace their beliefs from personal conviction. The campus, like the pluralistic society in which we live, offers a laboratory for testing and strengthening human values” (13). We use *civic* to refer to the responsibilities citizens have to their society, responsibilities defined by the college as students “*understanding* and *servicing* their world . . . using their talents, for the betterment of family, local community, society, and humankind” (12). While we recognize that these terms are slippery with multiple meanings, we intend to define them in a way so that we can apply them to practical writing situations.

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# Faculty Interdisciplinary Collaboration on a College- Wide Writing Guide

*Ellen M. Millsaps, Carson-Newman College*

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What common elements, if any, can one find about writing in biology, psychology, history, and English? Or, more to the point, what can be done to address student writing problems in these subjects and others? This was the challenge facing our faculty at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee, a small, private, Christian, liberal arts college.

After years of bemoaning student writing deficiencies at our annual faculty writing-across-the-curriculum retreats, we decided in May 1994 to address our concerns collaboratively by producing a campus-wide writing guide. After two years of work at faculty writing retreats and with follow-up committees, we produced *Writing at Carson-Newman College*, now in its third edition and beginning its seventh year of use.

What makes this book distinctive from other writing texts is that instead of one or even several authors, it was written by 41 of our faculty who served as departmental representatives. Thus it is truly interdisciplinary, addressing not only writing commonalities but also disciplinary differences. It was produced with a limited budget, but revenue from its sale continues to fund our WAC program. A required text in all of our freshman English classes, it is designed not just for freshmen, but for all of our students to use throughout their college careers, regardless of major.

To reinforce this multi-year purpose, our bookstore does not buy back this book, and with each succeeding year of use,

teachers in all disciplines have been encouraged to list this book as a required text. For example, during the first year of use, faculty teaching freshman level courses could require this text since all freshmen had bought it; with our seventh year beginning this fall, faculty teaching freshman to senior level courses can assume that students have this book and thus require it as a text.

In order to accomplish our goal of providing writing help for our students across the disciplines throughout their college years, we first had to determine the benefits of such a project, decide how to fund it, and then address some basic problems associated with producing and using it.

### **Advantages for Our Students**

Because of our concern that students were not recognizing the importance of writing beyond their freshman English courses, faculty felt that producing such a book would have several advantages for our students:

1. It would let students know that writing is important college-wide, not just in freshman English;
2. It could provide consistency of treatment of writing among those courses in our general education curriculum which already require writing;
3. It would provide a reference and examples for upper level courses and thereby help to refute the myth that writing is important only in English classes;
4. It would provide a common terminology for students and faculty concerning grammar and punctuation problems;
5. Besides models of typical writing assignments, this guide could also include samples of an application letter and resume to help all students with job searches; and
6. It would give transfer students an introduction to and a reference for writing expectations at our college.

### **Advantages for Faculty**

In addition to these benefits we envisioned for our students, we also felt that such a book would help our faculty in several ways:

1. It would give faculty members across the curriculum an opportunity to discuss and refine common expectations about student writing;
2. It would save time for faculty members by providing information, examples, and instructions for writing to which they could direct students;
3. It would be a useful reference for all faculty, especially for those who feel that teaching writing is outside their own areas of expertise, a common complaint from non-English-teaching faculty; and
4. Revenue from the sale of this guide could fund future workshops, writing retreats, guest speakers, and other activities designed to promote writing on our campus.

### **Funding of Project**

In 1995 and 1996, two Pew Faculty Development Grants totaling \$4,500 funded two faculty writing retreats (a total of three nights) where we did most of the work. In addition, I as editor was allotted \$1,800 to compile and edit the draft in the summer of 1995 (as director of WAC, I receive three hours of release time per year). An Appalachian College Association Discretionary Grant of \$3,000 in 1996 gave us the funds to complete the process of preparing the book for publication and printing it. Therefore, we were able to produce the book over a two-year period for approximately \$9,300, but the fact most appealing to our administration was that of this amount, only \$1,800 came from new college funds.

### **Four Problems Addressed Through Collaboration**

*Problem 1: Getting Campus Support*



We felt that the best way to reflect our college's commitment to writing was to produce a writing guide collaboratively, a process which enabled us to address at least four challenges that we faced. My first problem as WAC Director was how to get the majority of our faculty to support such a project. Therefore, an initial step was to determine the extent of campus concerns about student writing abilities. Through a series of interviews and surveys in the spring of 1994 (see Appendix A), I tabulated faculty responses to a number of questions such as the following:

1. List and rank from least to most important the factors that affect your evaluation of student writing in your courses.
2. What specific types of errors do you mark, if any?
3. What other concerns, comments, and/or suggestions do you have regarding student writing in your courses?

When I shared not only the common concerns but also areas of agreement from this investigation with approximately 30 faculty at our faculty writing retreat in May 1994, the group enthusiastically endorsed the concept of a collaborative, interdisciplinary writing guide. Getting approval from the dean of instruction and our academic council was not difficult, since this project had good potential benefits with minimal costs to the college. After presenting this idea to faculty in seven college divisions, I worked with 23 department chairs to choose representatives for our collaborative team. Because more than one faculty member from certain departments volunteered, however, we eventually had 41 faculty participating out of a total of 135.

Once we had begun this project, we informed faculty of progress and asked for input through campus newsletters and e-mail. Further opportunity for campus participation came as we submitted copies of drafts to faculty and students for review. For faculty evaluation, we sent one copy to each of the faculty representatives, an additional copy to each department and major administrative office, and several to the library (the refer-

ence librarian and the head of the library, both very knowledgeable about electronic documentation and Internet validation, provided invaluable aid). Knowing that a book intended for students needed to be reviewed by them, we had four student groups with a total of more than 100 students to critique the drafts.

*Problem 2: Assembling Faculty for Work*

A second problem of major importance involved how to get 41 faculty together to work with so many conflicting class and lab schedules, not to mention other time commitments. We solved this by collaboration in small groups.

In the spring of 1995, representatives met with their own departments to gather information and data concerning their expectations and suggestions for students writing in their discipline. While communicating via e-mail replaced large group meetings each semester, we accomplished the major portion of writing this book at our end-of-year faculty writing retreats. At these, faculty worked on tasks of their choice in small groups and then reported to the large group for consensus. For example, one group worked on advice for students taking essay exams, another explored expectations for different grades and wrote short themes to illustrate each, a third dealt with common grammar problems, and a fourth worked with common punctuation problems. Work not completed at the retreat was finished by the small groups and submitted for all to review in the draft which I produced the following summer.

*Problem 3: Getting Faculty Agreement on Content of Book*

Even though we had agreed initially on some common writing concerns, we still needed to determine our points of similarity and difference. To do this, we engaged in some collaborative exercises by departments. For example, each department answered the following questions:

1. What makes for good writing in your discipline?
2. How important is writing to your discipline?

3. What do you consider the most serious grammar errors?
4. What do various letter grades mean for evaluating writing?
5. What kinds of writing should every college student do?
6. What features characterize writing in your discipline?

Points of similarity became Section One: The Writing Process; Section Two: Types of Writing at Carson-Newman; and Section Three: Evaluating Writing (see Table of Contents in Appendix B). Differences were expressed in Section Four: Writing in Specific Disciplines. This section begins with a chart that lists each department; checks in columns indicate the frequency of writing required in this department (daily, weekly, monthly), the importance of writing to perform duties in this major as a career (important, very important), and the importance of writing for advancement in this major as a career (important, very important). Referring students to this chart to find their major helps to convince them that writing is important regardless of career choice.

Section Four also contains a page(s) for each department in two parts addressed to students. The first part describes writing in this department at Carson-Newman and gives an overview of the types of writing assigned, audiences for writing, point of view to use, typical research sources, specialized research tools, and suggestions for successful writing. The section devoted to music, for example, gives students information and examples about how to treat titles of musical compositions mentioned in a sentence depending on whether the title is a “generic,” “true,” or “popular” one. Books about writing in music that we have in our library are also listed, along with the call number. This section is useful not only to a student majoring in a particular subject, but also to a non-major who needs to know departmental expectations for writing.

The second part of the departmental page pertains to writing in a career based on this subject. It outlines typical writing tasks of selected careers in a field such as music and lists typi-

cal audiences. For example, a church musician might write letters, columns in church publications, program notes, and press releases, while a music therapist might write memos, letters, patient therapy plans, patient evaluative reports, grant applications, and reports to governing agencies. This second part gives students a realistic appraisal of writing expectations in a particular career.

*Problem 4: Making the Book Appealing to Students*

Realizing that a book is only helpful if it is used, we knew that another problem was how to interest students in this guide. Attacking this problem in several ways, first we considered the overall design of the book. We did not want multiple pages of unrelieved text, but we had neither the time nor skills to format the content in any other way. In yet another collaborative effort, a class in graphic design at Carson-Newman took on this book as a project. Each student prepared a dummy displaying his/her unique design of the first chapter from which a faculty committee chose one to use. The “winning” student was awarded a stipend to format the content for the remainder of the book. Using some pictures, especially funny ones, would make the book more inviting, suggested several student reviewers. Therefore, we collaborated with one of our alumni who drew cartoon illustrations for various parts of the text.

A second way we tried to “hook” students was by using humor throughout the book. For example, to illustrate correct comma and period placement with quotation marks, we used the following: “If the King James Version of the Bible was good enough for Jesus and his disciples,” roared the preacher, “then it’s good enough for me.” In the Glossary, we defined “writer’s block” by leaving it blank. After reviewing the entire book, one student paid us the ultimate compliment when he said, “That’s the way I would think, rather than a Ph.D. professor!”

We also used Carson-Newman-specific information whenever possible to add local interest to this book. Thus, the con-

tent becomes a mini-orientation for students to our college. For example, to illustrate various prewriting processes in Section One, we elaborated on a word from our college seal: “Appalachian.” “Where do I go for help?” in Section One includes the location and operating hours of campus computer labs, as well as an overview of the types of information located on each floor of our library. The section illustrating different documentation styles includes actual citations of books and articles by Carson-Newman professors to show that our faculty members write themselves.

Of course, one of the best ways to get students to use this book is for faculty to put it on their syllabi as a required text, to use it, and to refer to it in class. To encourage faculty to do this, I send e-mail messages, make announcements in faculty meetings, and suggest different uses in flyers which are included in faculty packets at the beginning of the academic year.

## **Results of the Project**

### *Effectiveness of the Book for Students and Faculty*

Overall, reaction to *Writing at Carson-Newman College* has been very positive from both students and faculty. After the first year of use, one of our student honor organizations designed and administered a survey to students in all freshman English classes and to all faculty to assess their reactions and to solicit suggestions for improvement. Students cited as most helpful the sections on word processing and research writing, but asked for more examples of electronic documentation. Faculty asked for a section on Internet validation, and indicated the need for more specific information in the department sections and easier access to topics throughout the book. We incorporated these suggestions in the second edition of the book which was used in the fall of 1998. The third edition (Fall 2002) includes the latest information on electronic documentation. For those upperclassmen with the earlier second edition, I have made these documentation changes available on my web page. We plan to con-

tinue to revise every two to four years to update information.

Just having our book available does not mean that everyone automatically remembers to use it. I find that I need periodically to send out e-mails to remind faculty to list this book on their syllabi as a required text (since students already have it), to ask them to remind their students of the section on taking essay exams at midterm and final examination times, and to have them refer students to the research sections as the semester progresses. I give new faculty an orientation to our writing across the curriculum program and our book at the beginning of the fall semester, and in the spring, I speak to the honors students, reminding them of the ways that our book can help them with writing their honors projects. At our annual faculty writing retreat in May, we usually have at least one session discussing ways we use the book as well as changes that would make it better. Evidence from this retreat suggests that many faculty are using the book effectively with their students in their classrooms.

### *Effectiveness of the Process of Faculty Collaboration*

The process of actually writing and compiling this guide has paid some unexpected dividends for us as faculty. As we wrote together, this project made us remember our own strengths and weaknesses as writers and thus made us more empathetic with our students' writing endeavors. From this process, we gained a reassuring consensus about the basics of good writing and concerns about students' writing. We developed a shared sense of mission: as one faculty member commented, "I liked thinking we will be producing a product for use campus-wide." We also gained an incentive to examine our own uses of writing in our disciplines. One faculty member wrote on an evaluation that he "got some ideas for improving what I do in class," while another stated that working on this book "pushed me to think more about technical writing in my own discipline."

One very "WAC" oriented benefit is that faculty gained a

clearer understanding of what is valued as good writing in different disciplines. For example, certain faculty learned that the passive voice may be preferred in certain disciplines, while some faculty who had pushed for a campus-wide style of documentation realized that one style cannot and should not be mandated for all students if we are to prepare them to write for different audiences in the world outside academia.

In addition, an increased appreciation for the dedication and creativity of other faculty members developed as a product evolved that was greater than its parts. As one faculty member remarked at the end of one of our retreats, “I was impressed by how hard my colleagues worked, how dedicated they were to the tasks, and how creative they were—especially at a very tiring time of the semester.” Finally, our collaborative process engendered a greater sense of camaraderie and community among faculty. If anyone happened to visit our group on a night of our retreat, one might see the following:

- professors from biology, English, math, and education writing an essay to illustrate various criteria listed for F to A grades (and hooting with laughter!)
- a musician, an accountant, and a developmental education professor composing illustrations for grammar rules.
- English, psychology, biology, and chemistry professors working on the research/ documentation sections.
- history, philosophy, and English faculty working on the essay exam section.

One faculty member summed up the overall feelings of the group by stating, “I think that besides getting work done on the writing guide, the most valuable aspect of the retreat was the cross-disciplinary interaction.”

Jean McGregor, in an article entitled “Collaborative Learning: Shared Inquiry as a Process of Reform,” describes a group involved in a common enterprise: the mutual seeking of understanding. Because many minds are simulta-

neously grappling with the material, while working toward a common goal, collaborative learning has the potential to unleash a unique intellectual and social synergy. (20)

As our faculty “worked toward a common goal,” we experienced this “unique intellectual and social synergy,” good indications that our collaboration, while producing the desired product, had benefits that we had not envisioned. The truth of the saying that “none of us is as smart as all of us” became real to us as we collaborated to produce this writing guide for our students.

### Work Cited

McGregor, Jean. “Collaborative Learning: Shared Inquiry as a Process of Reform.” *The Changing Face of College Teaching*. Ed. Marilla D. Svinicki. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. NY: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

### Appendix A

#### WRITING SURVEY\*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_

1. How important is writing for students in your discipline?
2. Will they need writing for professions in your field? If so, what kind?
3. What kind of writing do they do now?
4. How many writing assignments are required in one semester?
  - a. 1-3
  - b. 4-6
  - c. 7-9
  - d. 10-12
  - e. 13 or more



5. How long are the writing assignments you give your students?
  - a. between 100 and 300 words
  - b. between 300 and 500 words
  - c. between 500 and 1500 words
  - d. over 1500 words
6. What is the basis for assigning writing? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. A summary of what has been covered in class
  - b. An extension and/or expansion of what has been covered in class
  - c. A substitute for what cannot be covered in class
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. How do you teach writing with respect to your assignments? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. by an explanatory assignment sheet
  - b. by using a model paper as an example
  - c. by having students write assignments in class, or at least partly in class, under your supervision
  - d. by breaking the assignment into steps or stages and teaching each step separately
  - e. by verbal explanations
  - f. by using peer editing to offer helpful suggestions for fellow students in the process of writing
8. What types of corrections do you make on student papers? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. indicating errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage, and manuscript appearance, but not correcting the errors
  - b. indicating errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage, and manuscript appearance, and correcting the errors
  - c. indicating faulty sentences—e.g., vagueness, ambiguity, lack of sense—but not rewriting the sentences
  - d. indicating faulty sentences and rewriting them
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. What types of comments do you make on papers you assign? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. Comments about *form* (manuscript appearance, organization, grammar, spelling, punctuation) written in the margins
  - b. Comments about *form* written in a summary statement
  - c. Comments about *content* written in the margins
  - d. Comments about *content* written in a summary
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is the basis for your evaluation of the assignments? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. evaluation based on content only
  - b. evaluation based on form only
  - c. evaluation based on a combination of form and content (If you check this item, answer the following three sub-questions.)
    - 1) equal emphasis on form and content
    - 2) more emphasis on form than on content
    - 3) more emphasis on content than on form
11. How are grades assigned on the papers? (Check as many as are appropriate.)
  - a. a grade appears on the paper together with no evaluative comments (letter or number?)
  - b. a grade (letter or number?) appears on the paper together with evaluative comments
  - c. evaluative comments appear on the paper with no grade assigned
  - d. papers are returned to be revised before final grades are assigned
12. What style of documentation is used for research papers by your department?
13. Do you see problems with the writing of your students? If so, which of the following applies?
  - a. problems with grammar
  - b. problems with punctuation

- c. problems with spelling
  - d. problems with organization
  - e. problems with synthesis of information
  - f. problems with paraphrasing, summarizing
  - g. other \_\_\_\_\_
14. What can be done to help raise the writing levels of our students?
15. Are you interested in finding out more about using writing in your classes?
- a. workshop
  - b. teaching a writing-emphasis course in your department
  - c. team-teaching
  - d. other \_\_\_\_\_
16. The teaching of writing should be the responsibility of
- a. the English teacher
  - b. the content-area teacher
  - c. other \_\_\_\_\_

\*Adapted from a survey in an article by Dan Donlan, "Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Eleven Hypotheses from a Teacher Survey." *Research in the Teaching of English* 8 (Spring 1974): 250-262.

\* \* \*

## **Appendix B**

### **Table of Contents of *Writing at Carson-Newman College***

Acknowledgments

Preface

#### **Introduction**

Benefits of Learning to Write Better 9

Some Purely Practical Reasons to Write Well 9

Less Tangible Benefits of Writing Well 11

Five Myths About Writing in General 12

Eight Myths About Writing at Carson-Newman 12

**Section One: The Writing Process**

How Can I Get Started on a Paper? 13

Brainstorming or Mind-mapping 14

Clustering 15

Freewriting 16

Looping 17

Outlining 18

How Do I Write a Draft? 19

How Can I Organize My Paper? 20

What Can I Do for Writer's Block? 21

What Does Revising a Paper Mean? 23

How Should I Edit a Paper? 24

How Is This Paper Supposed to Look? 25

Seven Common Grammatical and/or Usage Errors 27

Seven Common Causes of Punctuation Problems 30

Inclusive Language 35

Peer Editing—How to Help Each Other 36

How Can I Proofread Effectively? 40

What If Computers and Word Processing Are Greek to Me? 41

Where Do I Go for Help? 42

Your Professors 42

The Academic Support Center 42

The Stephens-Burnett Library 42

Campus Computer Labs 44

**Section Two: Types of Writing at Carson-Newman**

The Technical Report 45

Essay Exams 50

A Critical Analysis or Review 54

Research Paper 56

Research at the Library 56

The Internet as a Research Tool 60

Taking Notes 64

Using Summaries, Paraphrases, and Quotations in Your Paper 66

Correct Versus Incorrect Use of Sources 71

Documentation Format Preferences by Department 76  
Overview of Documentation Styles 79  
A Checklist of Questions to Ask Yourself about Your Research  
Paper 94  
Academic Honesty Statement 96  
Cover Letter/Resume 97

**Section Three: Evaluating Writing**

Why Did I Get This Grade??? 101  
Writing from F to A 102

**Section Four: Writing in the Disciplines**

General Information for Using This Section 105  
Frequency and Importance of Writing in the Disciplines 106  
Art/Photography 108  
Biology 110  
Business and Economics 111  
Chemistry 113  
Communications 115  
Education 117  
English 119  
Family and Consumer Sciences 121  
Foreign Languages 122  
Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services 125  
History/Political Science 126  
Mathematics 128  
Military Science 129  
Music 131  
Nursing 133  
Philosophy 134  
Physics 135  
Psychology 136  
Religion 138  
Sociology 140

**Appendix A: Writing Samples**

Sample Lab Report 141  
Sample Research Paper (MLA Style) 146

Sample Critique/Review 150  
Sample Cover Letter and Resume 151  
**Appendix B:** Key to Acronyms Associated with Library Research 154  
**Glossary** 156  
**Index** 162



# Review

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# Where WAC is Heading

*Jacob S Blumner, Eastern Michigan University*

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Susan H. McLeod, Eric Miraglia, Margot Soven, and Christopher Thaiss, eds. *WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Programs*. Urbana: NCTE, 2001. 345 pages. \$37.95.

Chris M. Anson, ed. *The WAC Casebook: Scenes for Faculty Reflection and Program Development*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 290 pages. \$21.95.

Mikhail Bakhtin describes the context for disciplinary conversations as a parlor in which the conversations have been going on long before one arrives and continue long after one leaves. Those newly entering the conversation work hard to understand what has come before, so they can enter the conversation and shape what will come in the future. Ideally, one has a guide to facilitate entrance, and, for many, graduate school serves that role. Part of that schooling is poring over texts that have shaped the discipline, so as to understand its history, trends, and tendencies. Those already in the parlor periodically need to reconsider where the conversation is heading. The two books reviewed here, *WAC for the New Millennium* and *The WAC Casebook*, offer an opportunity to reconsider where WAC is heading in the future. Both texts tack differently in the wind, but they both sail toward the same destination: sustained, successful WAC programs.

*WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-across-the-curriculum Programs*, edited by Susan H. McLeod, Eric Miraglia, Margot Soven, and Christopher Thaiss, is a collection of articles written by some of the foremost WAC scholars. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of WAC from assessment to technology, and they vary from fairly practical descriptions of programs and approaches, like Martha Townsend's chap-



ter on “Writing Intensive Courses and WAC,” to highly theoretical pieces, like the closing essay by Christopher Thaiss, “Theory in WAC: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?” In the latter chapter, Thaiss looks at the “core of consistent WAC principles” and “the theoretical influences that have worked changes on the concept [of WAC].” He brilliantly frames his discussion by taking each component of the name “writing across the curriculum” and exploring its implications. This provides a powerful and thought-provoking end to the book.

The collection also includes a skeptical voice, Victor Villanueva, who writes “The Politics of Literacy Across the Curriculum.” Villanueva writes in an unconventional genre that includes personal narrative, poetry, and past professional correspondence, and he questions the politics of language education and the teaching and conforming to language conventions.

Despite each chapter’s differences in content and style, all of the chapters have some similarities. To aid in the parlor discussion, each chapter provides a history of their topic, some extensively, like David R. Russell’s “Where Do the Naturalistic Studies of WAC/WID Point? A Research Review,” and Ann M. Johns’s “ESL Students and WAC Programs: Varied Populations and Diverse Needs.” Each of these chapters guides the reader, like one of many hosts, informing newcomers of the path the discussion has taken and, in many cases, where it began. These histories of WAC also recount the discussion for those who have been present, synthesizing them for focused reflection. In both cases, the background is an important element of this collection. As Elaine P. Maimon describes in her opening lines, WAC has staying power, even over other academic initiatives, and it is important to understand the history of WAC to understand its future.

The twelve chapters appropriately cover the most current issues being discussed in WAC literature such as assessment, technology, service learning, ESL, and learning communities, and this breadth of discussion demonstrates the WAC movement’s ability to adapt and inform other educational initiatives (McLeod and

Miraglia 1). But there is a drawback to the currency of the collection, and it could simply be related to the title. When I finished the book and I thought back over the century-plus history of writing in the disciplines, I wondered what the next millennium might hold. Certainly even Nostradamus couldn't look one thousand years into the future, but I wished the book had really tried to look further into the future. The authors summarize the history of their respective topics well, and nearly all of the authors discuss programs with innovative approaches to WAC. But none really looks far into the future. What might the academy look like and what role might writing play in it, particularly in light of changing technology? How might political pressure alter the way writing is taught in higher education? What might voice-recognition software or highly intuitive grammar checkers hold for the future? What are possible futuristic forms of assessment that science fiction might dream up, and how will the aforementioned technologies affect assessment? These are questions that the book's title seems to imply.

In some ways, Chris M. Anson's *The WAC Casebook* cracks open doors to some of these questions through questions of its own. *The WAC Casebook* is a collection of 45 scenarios that faculty and WAC directors have found or may find themselves in. In many ways, the *Casebook* serves as a metaphorical moderator in Bakhtin's parlor. It raises questions and guides the discussion without showing bias. Anson, like the editors of *WAC for the New Millennium*, has tapped many well-respected WAC scholars to contribute scenarios. The book is broken into eight sections that range from very specific issues surrounding assignment design, like Anson's "Trudy Does Comics," to broader programmatic concerns, like Carol Peterson Haviland and Edward M. White's "'We Hate You!' WAC as a Professional Threat." This range of scenarios is one of the strengths of the book because it lends itself to so many uses. WAC directors can use the book with faculty individually or in workshops, and faculty can use the book in courses that help prepare future teachers.

Though the scenarios vary widely in topic, they have some commonalities that help make the book cohesive. Each chapter provides a detailed scenario, most with dialogue, of a difficult situation. No answers are given, and this is one of the strengths of the book. Most academic articles and books forward a particular theory or approach to these topics, but as most literature about faculty development initiatives advocates, each solution must be site-specific. So, these scenarios provide the fuel to find those local solutions. For example, Christine Farris's chapter, "Who Has the Power?" includes a dialogue among faculty discussing a political science colleague's assignment. The scenario provides dialogue and three student essay exam models; there is plenty of fodder for discussion. Fortunately, the contributors to the book do more than simply provide the scenario. They also provide discussion questions, like one would find at the end of textbook chapters. Farris's chapter includes questions asking if it's clear what the professor wants the students to do and how might the professor write a more successful assignment. The questions are not leading and most will stimulate discussion. I would encourage users of the book to develop secondary questions that address more site-specific needs. The questions are good, but alone might be too generic.

Better than the questions, though, is another addition the authors provide: "Readings for Further Consideration" for each scenario. The scenarios will stimulate great discussion, but faculty and students may want additional resources to better understand the problem and to help them find the best solution. The length of each list varies from three to ten sources. In fact, the reading lists are one of the strengths of the book because they almost serve as an annotated bibliography, referencing specific sources based on the topic. They point to past discussions that should influence future ones in the parlor. I wish the lists were longer, and I think the book would benefit from a bibliography at the end that could include the recommended readings and other readings that might not have been referenced. These criticisms are small,

and readers will find the book instructive and fun, particularly those who have experienced some of the scenarios presented and those who have the opportunity to discuss the scenarios in lively discussions.

Both books, *WAC for the New Millennium* and *The WAC Casebook*, will spur lively discussion, and readers can use the ideas within them to lead the discussions in the parlor and shape the future of WAC. They both serve the purpose of introducing readers to the world of WAC and guide readers to consider the future of WAC programs, and both books are indispensable for directors of WAC programs. Hopefully, they will inspire writers to look further into the future and dream of possibilities for better writing instruction and student learning.

## Notes on Contributors

**Jacob S Blumner** is Assistant Professor of Written Communication and the director of the WAC program at Eastern Michigan University. He co-edited *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships* and the *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice* with Robert W. Barnett. His article “Beyond the Reactive: WAC Programs and the Steps Ahead,” co-authored with John Eliason and Francis Fritz, appeared in Volume 12 of *The WAC Journal*.

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