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University Writing Center vs. Secondary English Classroom:
Are Collegiate Writing Center Non-Directive Tutoring Strategies
Effective in the Teaching of Writing in the Secondary Classroom?

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Dr. Sue Weinstein

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Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

This project is dedicated to every teacher, every where.

You have molded, nurtured, and developed me into the thinker I am today. I am eternally grateful for the guiders, friends, and mentors you have all been.

A special thanks to:

Every student with whom I have worked, and every student whom I will guide in the future. Each of you has and will teach me something new about myself every day.

Dr. Sue Weinstein, whose guidance and patience throughout the entire process, and whose appreciation for my thespian abilities, has helped me to keep going.

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Dr. Steven T. Bickmore, LSU English and education professor, whose willingness to discuss and expose the art of writing in the classroom sparked the flame of enlightenment.

Here's to passing the torch...

“Teaching, of course, is holding open
the door and staying out of the way.”

“Not Academic”
Marie Ponsot

“To refuse revision is to refuse thought itself.”

The Practice of Writing
Robert Scholes and Nancy Comley

A Student Teacher's Perspective of Teaching Writing to Students

Writing is an art form. Teaching writing is a skill. I have always considered myself a decent writer, someone who can spruce up a sentence to send it over the top by adding glitter, glamour, and the occasional hyphenated modifier. In fact, teachers in my secondary schooling convinced me I was a superb writer, as I never recall earning any letter grade lower than a B. And even the B was occasional. I had figured out the secret to writing, right? I knew how to manipulate the semicolon so well that I was forced to teach my peers.

Sometimes, though, a semicolon does not fit a writer's personality. Granted, the writer may instead use a comma incorrectly, but for that one moment during the writing process, for that one alleged pause, the comma seems absolutely correct to him or her. When the student receives his or her graded paper, though, the comma is circled with little or no explanation as to why it is wrong. The teacher has found fault; the student has lost points. The student notices the circle, thinks, "Hm, I suppose this is wrong. I guess I will just delete in the next draft," hands in the new comma-free paper, and the teacher smiles, knowing the problem has been corrected.

In an ideal world, this is how learning happens. The teacher can make a comment or two or draw a circle or two or three or four and the student will go home, look up the rule in the resource manual that he or she frequents, and understand fully how he or she has erred. The teacher assumes the GLE or benchmark has been met and checks it off the list of "things to do." Two papers later, the same mistake occurs.

What is a writing teacher to do to ensure student comprehension of writing strategies, rules, and regulations? How can the teacher teach flow? How can the teacher recommend a varied sentence structure when students still do not grasp the concept of a semicolon? It is almost like the proverbial, "Which came first? The chicken or the egg?" Can anyone answer that?

Usually, discussions and debates go in a circle with no clear victor. But when it comes to teaching writing, does the same endless cycle exist? Does not one process **have to** come before the other? Can we teach varied sentence structure without teaching semicolons or subordinating conjunctions?

Throughout my experiences of helping with and observing student writing, I have noticed that the line between teaching *writing* and teaching *grammar* seems to be much thinner than what I think most students can handle. I do not pretend to be an expert on the teaching of writing, but I do label myself as someone who has had extensive experience working with student writers over the last two years. In the campus writing center and in a freshman English classroom at laboratory high school on campus, I have helped numerous students with the art of writing. I use the term “writing” to include much more than grammatical soundness. Like most writing teachers, I try to focus on style, voice, flow, and coherency. Grammar practice and study is imperative and empirical, but it should not reign supreme over the discussions in class, nor should the majority of comments and feedback center around the misuse of punctuation.

My ultimate concern with the teaching of writing focuses on one main question: How much guidance and feedback is too much or too directive? Ultimately, I wanted to investigate in a very general sense to what students respond more – a teacher circling mistakes and telling students exactly how to revise their problems? Or a teacher suggesting techniques and strategies to help lead students to their own understandings? Or is it a combination of both? As tempting as it may be to circle every mistake, as enticing as it seems to scratch out a student’s wording because it seems too flowery, teachers need to be careful with their feedback and guidance. My interactions with both first-year college students in a university writing center and first-year high school students in a classroom have taught me that while directive teaching is effective in

improving the *paper*, it does not necessarily improve the *writer*. By applying collegiate writing center strategies to the secondary classroom setting, I wanted to explore which strategies were effective and translatable and which ones were not.

Characteristics of Tutoring in a Writing Center

In “Diplomatic Relations: Peer Tutors in the Writing Classroom,” Teagen Decker writes, “The relationship between the classroom and the writing center has been a major theoretical issue for decades; there is no quick and easy answer.” There are some people who advocate that the university writing center is a place where learning and growth occurs, thus making it a classroom. There are others who believe that a writing center session and a classroom are **not** one in the same, such as Stephen North, one of the leading figures in writing center developments. He believes there is a radical separation. In a 1984 study called “The Idea of a Writing Center,” North writes, “We are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum.”

This thesis does not aim to analyze the efficiency of university writing centers, nor does it intend to advocate strategies in the writing center over those in the secondary classroom. Writing center philosophies usually describe tutoring with four main principles: contextual, collaborative, interpersonal, and individualized (Gillespie 1). The writing center is a dynamic place, as subject matter and personalities change from half-hour to half-hour. One session can analyze Shakespeare with a freshmen female who refuses to talk, while the next one may be a historical analysis of Charlemagne’s actions with a male who cannot take criticism and refuses to stop talking. By analyzing the *context* of the center, we see that the number of sociocultural and interpersonal contexts lend richness and complexity to the tutor’s role.

Next, tutoring is a *collaborative* effort. Two people are working together toward a common goal. At all times, Murphy and Sherwood agree, the session should seem like a conversation. No one should take complete ownership of the situation. Because of this, tutoring is an interpersonal process. As mentioned, the context of each session can change drastically,

meaning the tutor must be prepared to interact personally with a wide variety of people in a very short amount of time. Accordingly, no single method will work for all sessions. Therefore, the process must be very individualized. “Tutoring sessions are as unique and individual as the students who come to be tutored” (Gillespie 1).

While no tutorial is ever exactly like another, most tend to share common patterns. There are stages to the tutoring process: pretextual, textual, and posttextual. The order seems logical enough, but unfortunately not every writer takes advantages of all three different types of sessions. In the *pretextual stage*, the tutor and student begin developing the interpersonal relationship. This will help guide the future collaborations. In “Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well,” Christina Murphy maintains that the mutual trust and rapport between tutor and student determine how successful the tutorial as a whole will be. Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith claim that tutors “must listen carefully to distinguish underlying meanings in writers’ comments” (Murphy 9). The tutor must be prepared to relate to the student as an individual and emphasize the student’s personality.

The *textual stage* includes a wide array of issues. Sometimes it is just writer’s block, sometimes students have no clue how to use a comma, sometimes they simply cannot understand a passage about which they must write, and even sometimes they cannot understand the teacher’s prompt. Because the goal of the tutor should be to assist writers in making long-term improvements and not quick-fix strategies, Toby Fulwiler writes in “Provocative Revision” that “revision is the primary way that both thinking and writing evolve, mature, and improve.” One of the biggest challenges as a tutor is that the writers associate tutoring with editing.

One critical question I often encountered was how candid to be with people. How blunt is too blunt. As Peter Elbows says in *Writing with Power*, “Some people are terrified no matter how

friendly the audience is, while others are not intimidated even by sharks” (184-5). Murphy and Sherwood advocate giving a candid opinion of the strengths and weaknesses of the work in progress, while remaining sensitive to the student’s reactions in the process. Honesty is much more important than simply making the writer feel well about him or herself. “Anything short of a truthful – but also sensitive – appraisal is a betrayal of the student’s trust” (Murphy 19). Another method involves suggesting ways to enhance the strengths and to minimize the weaknesses. The tutor cannot simply focus on everything negative. Pointing out the positive aspects helps with gaining the writer’s trust. Finally, Murphy and Sherwood believe that the tutor should recognize that every text and every writer is a work in progress. They believe a “tutor can encourage progress by fostering potential” (Murphy 20).

North characterizes the tutor as a researcher. He says, “I think probably the best way to describe a writing center tutor is a holist devoted to participant-observer methodology” (439). North explains holism, drawing on Diesing’s *Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences*; he introduces a notion of process that is highly flexible and adaptive; and then he recoils a bit from the researcher comparison, commenting, “I do not want to push the participant-observer analogy too far” (439).

In the *posttextual stage*, there are two major functions. A sense of closure is provided, and a template, or model, is presented to the writer for future learning experiences. Usually an overview is reached by both parties. The tutor cannot simply end the session. Hopefully this is a time when the students gain the “confidence they need to take the insights they have gained and apply them in new writing situations” (Murphy 20). Sherwood thinks that, by encouraging students and letting them know they can achieve future success on their own, by reminding students of any challenges they have conquered on their own, by recognizing and praising any

steps they take toward independence in their writing, by refusing to let student credit you with their success, and by letting them know that you will always be there to help, students will have a sense of closure. Christina Murphy says, “A good tutor functions to awaken individuals to their potentials and to channel their creative energies toward self-enhancing ends” (22). During training to become a teacher, it was important to pay attention to the difference between directly influencing the direction a student takes in his or her paper or merely guiding him or her to a “self-enhancing” mode.

The following is a journal reflection from October 2007 about my ideas on directive vs. non-directive tutoring. It was written before I began tutoring in the writing center. These expressions and beliefs are based soled on theory I had learned up until that point:

Directive vs. Nondirective Tutoring

While I was reading a book of proverbs last week, I came across a wonderful quote from The Tao of Teaching. It reminded me that “a good teacher is better than a spectacular teacher. Otherwise the teacher outshines the teachings.” After reading about non-directive tutoring in Brooks’ article “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Students Do All the Work,” I found this quote most appropriate to the overall agenda of a minimalist tutor. The main question a tutor must ask himself about his pedagogy is, “What is my purpose? What relationship do I want to establish with the person whom I am tutoring?”

*As I have observed in the Writing Center a few times, I have noticed that nearly every tutor follows what Brooks calls the “minimalist approach.” The common orthodoxy that tutors abide by is one of making sure that students learn **how** to write. Period. The overall “goodness” of a paper is irrelevant. As Brooks says, “Make the student the primary agent in the writing center session...the process is far more important than the product” (169-70). That being said, a*

few examples of minimalist tutoring came to mind when I recollected my tutoring observations.

*Brooks' "basic" minimalist tutoring is probably the most relevant and apparent level of tutoring that I observed. Each time the tutor sat next to the writer, a signal to the writer that the tutor is not "in charge" of the paper (170). Also, I observed the tutor asking the writer to read his paper aloud. I have accepted these two "rules" as a given practice in a tutoring session. In his "advanced minimalist tutoring," Brooks reminds us to concentrate on the success of a paper. In one particular observation, Jane (the tutor) complimented the writer for his descriptive abilities. It was very apparent that the writer felt more confident to talk to her and discuss more ideas. Brooks also advises the tutor to get the student to talk (171). This is a major part of the tutoring sessions I have observed. Many times Jane would ask questions to force the writer to respond by thinking aloud. Remember, as we have read, a session should be like a conversation, meaning the writer **must** talk.*

I suppose that most of the texts we have read have encouraged such practices. I assumed they were the best methods since they have been discussed and re-discussed in our readings. After all, I have observed mostly non-directive methods in the Writing Center. However, after reading Shamoan and Burns' "A Critique of Pure Tutoring," I realized that non-directive tutoring is not necessarily the best form of tutoring, and I am a bit discouraged that we have not discussed further the elements of directive tutoring. Shamoan and Burns (S&B), along with Teresa Henning in her article "The Tutoring Style Decision Tree: A Useful Heuristic for Tutors," remind us that one tutoring approach does not fit all (S&B 178). Because of this flexibility of tutoring pedagogies, I find the directive tutoring method fascinating. S&B describe non-directive tutoring as "providing a sheltered, protected time and space" (182). It provides "periods of observation and protected practice focused on important skills developments" (183).

I tried to think of specific examples that might justify a non-directive session. It seemed like a futile task, but I remembered at least one example. Jane (the tutor) tried to explain to the writer how to use the idea of “Show More Than Tell.” Jane wrote an example on a piece of paper, explaining how the description was much more effective. The writer then did the same thing, applying the same logic as Jane’s. This is what S&B mean when they say that “composing skills and writing behaviors may be learned through imitation” (182). Clearly, the writer imitates Jane. And it is effective.

*The main advantage that I think directive tutoring has over non-directive tutoring is the interaction between tutor and student. S&B say, “[Directive tutoring] allows both student and tutor to be the subjects of the tutoring session, while nondirective tutoring allows only the **student’s** work to be the center of the tutoring session” (184). I think it is important for the tutor’s input and guidance to not be completely disregarded. It is great if a writer comes to his own realization after the tutor has non-directly tutored him. However, not all students learn the same way. Personally, after a teacher edited AND added comments to my papers, I learned a great deal about writing. Just because the teachers recommended something did not always mean that I just went with what they suggested. Their comments made me think outside of the box. Their comments forced me to analyze my writing to see if I truly believed it. In this sense, the teachers’ methods were effective. It can be argued that the nondirective tutoring can have the same outcome, but as I said, different people learn differently. The opening quote I use says, “A good teacher is better than a spectacular teacher. Otherwise the teacher outshines the teachings.” Sometimes I think it is important for the teacher to shine just as brightly as the teachings. A good teacher is a remembered teacher. As a future teacher, I want to be remembered for my quirky methods, my idiosyncratic pedagogy, and my **direct** approach to*

helping students.

Setting the Scene: What is the University Writing Center?

During my first semester of junior year, I was enrolled in a course that trains students to become tutors in the writing center on campus. The following semester, I began working as a tutor three days a week in the writing center. I continued to work there my first semester of senior year. During my training process and throughout the numerous sessions in which I was engaged, one ideal, one principle, remained constant: The goal of the Writing Center is to produce better writers, not better papers. The idea, on the surface, always initially confused me. If we, as tutors in the writing center, were not helping students produce better papers, what was our purpose? How could we ensure the trust of our users if we were sending them off with C or D-worthy papers? The Louisiana State University Writing Center website offers its philosophy:

OUR PHILOSOPHY

*The philosophy of the **LSU Writing Center** is that all writers can benefit from the feedback of trained readers. Our tutors can be the “other voice” experienced writers use when they have colleagues read and critique their ongoing work. We can suggest strategies to improve your writing.*

*Trained tutors can help during all stages of the writing process—**planning, drafting, and revising**—and may discuss options to improve various features of a written text—**development, organization, audience adaptation, sentence structure, or usage**, for example. Rather than proofreading or editing documents, our tutors approach writing*

conferences with long-term goals in mind, teaching strategies and skills in different stages of the writing process that will transfer to future writing tasks.

*Writing tutors are prepared to work with students on their writing assignments for LSU coursework (such as **essays, research papers, documentation, reports, reviews, dissertations**) and with documents related to career pursuits (for instance, **personal statements for graduate school, resumes, application letters**). Conferences are collaborative. Writers and tutors work together to analyze assignments, review drafts, and discuss ways to improve communication.*

We welcome and encourage LSU students to try our services as they work to become better writers. (<http://www.lsu.edu/departments/writingcenter/philosophy.html>)

The focus of this thesis is not about my experiences in the writing center. Lessons learned during both my writing center training and tutoring have contributed greatly to my experiences in the secondary classroom. It is my aim to show how the same principles applied to the collegiate writing center can translate to the secondary classroom. After all, writing is writing no matter where one goes. Although Thomas Newkirk is specifically interested in the writing center atmosphere, his ideas extend into the secondary classroom. The main distinction between the collegiate writing center and secondary classroom is time and availability. In the writing center, writers are allowed to make up to three thirty-minute appointments in one week. The topics are limitless, as are where the writer is in his or her writing process. Brainstorming sessions or eighteenth-draft sessions are encouraged and acknowledged. The only kind of assistance the writing center will not provide (an idea the center is extremely adamant about) is the correction

of grammar. Writing centers are not grammar garages, as grammar is considered more of a lower order concern than a higher order concern. These concerns will be discussed later.

Strategy #1: “Breaking the Ice” in a Writing Center Session

Establishing a connection with the writer is one of the most important, and often overlooked, processes. Often referred to as “breaking the ice,” this step is crucial in establishing a fun and positive atmosphere. In his article “The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference,” Thomas Newkirk argues that the writing conference situation requires that instructor and student set a mutual agenda within the first few minutes of the conference, or the conference will feel pointless. If students do not feel comfortable or if they are not put at ease, they will not be as likely to open up and discuss their writing because their writing is, after all, something personal.

This is especially important for the writing center, as often the clients are unfamiliar people who sometimes only come one time out of the entire semester. We, as tutors, effectively worked with strangers. It was important first to explain the role of the writing center, answer any questions, and minimize any concerns. Ultimately, every session required an ice breaker.

The secondary classroom is a bit different. I had already established relationships with the students. By the time I assigned the paper, I had interacted with the students for approximately four weeks. They already had writing expectations set up by my mentor teacher. They are always required to include a heading, cannot be too flowery with their word choice, must always use proper register, and must always double space. Basically, they were expected to implement MLA qualities. While I did not deviate too much from the teacher’s methodology, I did implement make clear my expectations that no one was to turn in anything he or she was not

proud of. While I did not yet have my students' trust as the grader of their writer, a rapport was already established.

American journalist Edward Murrow once said in a broadcast, "People say conversation is a lost art; how often I have wished it were." Clearly, Mr. Murrow is not a firm believer in the importance of conversation. Conversation connects people. Conversation unites ideas. In chapter seven of Gillespie and Lerner's (G&L) *Peer Tutoring* and in Christina Murphy's article "Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well," the idea of a tutor establishing a genuine connection with the writer is imperative. Both sources maintain that tutoring can be self-fulfilling and insightful if the tutor approaches the conference with patience, diligence, and a willingness to partake in genuine conversation.

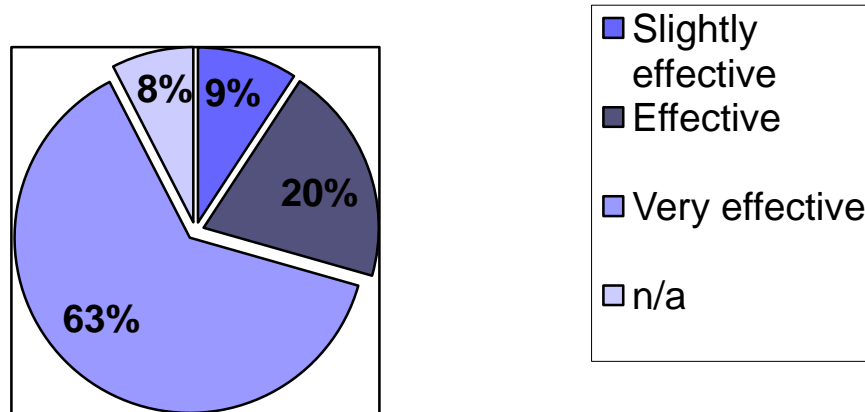
Tutoring can be a very rewarding experience. G&L include a tutor's personal account of one of his conferences: "Experiencing a successful tutoring session as a writer made me realize the true value of tutoring...It was humbling and thought-provoking, but it was extremely helpful" (99). I have observed a student's eyes light up when he comes to his own realization after a tutor asks for clarification about a particular word or sentence. Just by forcing the writer to think, the tutor is able to show that a) the tutor genuinely cares about the overall improvement of the paper and b) the tutor is concerned with the overall improvement of the student. G&L provide techniques for making sure that the tutor does not talk too much. After all, a session should be like a dialogue and conversation. From what I have observed, the tutors have done a great job allowing the writer to speak his mind. The tutors have been patient, as G&L instruct, and have "given the writer time and space" to actually act on modeling suggestion (100). Once, a tutor asked a student to write down a list of examples of descriptions and left the room. It was effective, and the writer was proud of himself.

Christina Murphy advocates that because of the genuine relationship students have with tutors, the tutor-writer relationship is a friendly, more supportive one. She quotes, “The person who is better able to communicate warmth, genuineness, and accurate empathy is more effective in interpersonal relationships” (97). Breaking the ice is a perfect example of the warmth and genuine affection, but this interpersonal relationship must extend throughout the entire session. When I was tutored for my writing project in the tutoring training class, the tutor was very personable and empathized with my situation by telling a story that related to my ideas. Murphy says, “The tutoring process...partakes in the power of language to reshape and empower consciousness” (99). Indeed, by forcing me to think out my ideas, by asking me to re-examine my intentions, and by talking to me in a conversational tone, the tutor was able to reach me on a personal level. Without the fear of an awkward relationship, I was able to better open up the tutor and express genuine ideas.

Strategy #2: Having the Writer Read Aloud

One significant aspect of a writing session in the writing center is to allow the writer to read his or her own paper aloud. Reading aloud does many different things for the writer. For example, he or she notices awkward phrasing or typos and will usually discover personal writing tendencies. Some advantages include the tutor’s ability to bypass awkward moments while he or she read the writer’s paper; the writer will be involved in his or her paper; the writer can correct his or her own errors, thus helping make the paper sound “good.” In a survey I completed with nine tutors with whom I worked, I discovered that most tutors think this strategy is effective.

Effectiveness of reading aloud

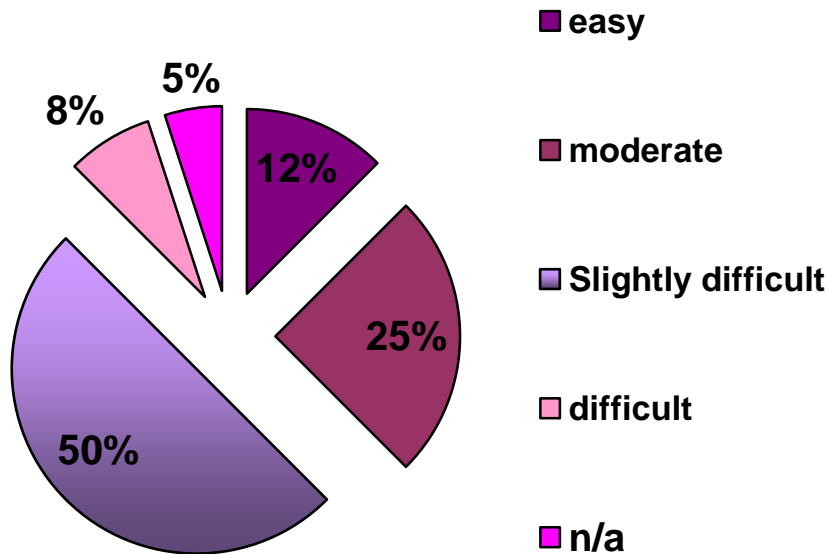


Almost two-thirds of the tutors admitted that this strategy is effective. One female said, “I don’t think that students have confidence in their writing. By asking them to read aloud their own work, I think we are engaging the student and encouraging him to own his own work. It gives him much more ownership.”

Strategy #3: Giving Compliments

In his article “Learning How to Praise,” Donald Daiker advocates the use of praise to encourage student writing. Without the proper encouragement, he argues, students will not open up enough to discuss their writing. The writing center must be a safe environment. Negativity cannot and will not effectively allow students to express themselves freely. While working with students, one of the most consistent compliments I received from the writers was my rapport and ability to make them feel like competent writers. Most students’ initial comments in the writing center is, “I’m sorry, but I’m not a very good writer. I know this is wrong...” I always stopped

them, pointing out that everyone has the potential to create a piece of writing that is competent and something for which he or she should be proud. I never allowed the session to begin negatively. When asked, “How difficult is it for you to provide compliments to students and their writing?” my peer tutors’ feelings were split.



As the graph shows, half of the tutors found it slightly difficulty, while a quarter thought it was moderately simple.

Some of the main advantages of praising others, I found, include:

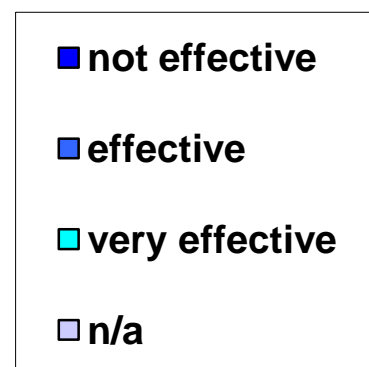
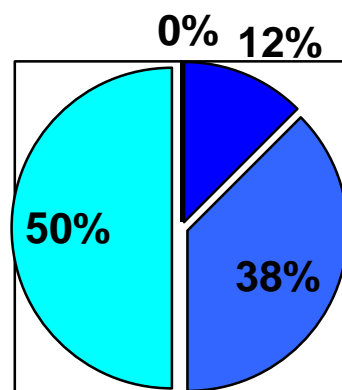
- the tutor can point out what the writer is doing right.
- the tutor shows the writer that the paper is a text to be analyzed, thus helping pointing out strengths and weaknesses in a paper.
- the tutor can break away from the role of editor.

Strategy #4: Making the Writers Do the Talking

One strategy that should be employed when teaching writing is to allow the student (or the writer) to do most of the talking. The tutor is there to guide and suggest. After all, the goal of the writing center is to produce better writers, not better papers. Here are some strategies and benefits of having the writer do most of the talking during a session:

- Ask the writer “leading questions” when the tutor discovers a problem in the paper.
- Questions such as “What do you mean by this?” and what’s your reason’s for putting Q before N?” will help the writer find his or her own errors
- Asking open questions beginning with what, why, how, or when will allow the writer to respond with more than just a few words.
- When tutors ask these questions this forces the writers to think.
- Tutors should try not to rephrase the question or even try to answer the question.

What tutors said about Strategy #4

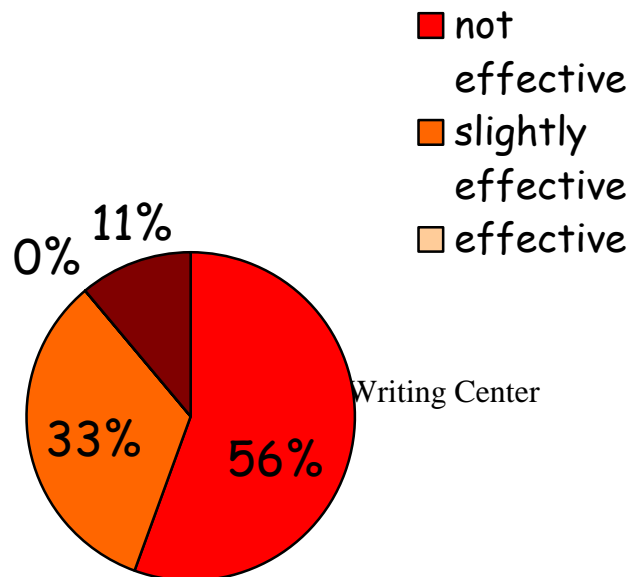


Strategy #5: Responding Effectively to Writers

In the writing center, all of the feedback is verbal. One strategy we were advised to use was the “no pen” session. We were not even supposed to pick up our pens during the entire session; that way we would not be tempted to write on the student’s paper. We could use dry erase markers to show an example of a particular format or to help with brainstorming, but many times we were advised never to pick up a pen or pencil. I always held a pencil in my hand, but I used it to jot down notes and an outline of the student’s paper as he or she read so I could easily refer to the organization of the paper once the student was finished reading.

Students wanted reassurance, and it was very difficult at times to know what to say to a student’s particular question. We by no means wanted to steer the student in the wrong direction by lying and saying the paragraph or thesis was great, but at the same time we did not want to discourage completely the student’s ideas. When the student asked, “What should I do here?” the tutor should always respond with something similar to “I don’t know” or “I can’t tell you.” Responses like these will effectively prevent the writer from forcing the tutor into the roles of the editor and hopefully alleviate any anger or upset nature of a writer who wants a factual answer.

How tutors felt about Strategy #5



In my final observation in the writing center before I was to become an actual tutor, I reflected on the session and the importance of establishing an agenda:

John Locke once wrote, “It is easier for a tutor to command than to teach.” I do not think Locke had a power-hungry mentality, one that expressed that tutors should berate and subject their writers to harsh criticism or demand. I do not even think Locke advocated any form of punishment for unruly students. I do think, however, that Locke raises an interesting point about the process of tutoring. Do composition tutors command a writer to change his words? Or do composition tutors genuinely explain and teach a concept to students? Is it a mixture of both? Clearly, if a tutor sits on the nondirective/directive fence, these two concepts, commanding and teaching, become hazy. There is no formula for tutoring. There is no “holy” guideline sheet that clearly and explicitly describes what must be done to be an effective tutor. There is, however, accountability for the tutor. Can the tutor effectively guide and teach his student? Commanding is easy. Teaching/connecting is the difficult part. In my second observation conference in the Writing Center, I wanted to see how effective the tutor was in teaching and not commanding.

A good tutor connects with his writer. Christina Murphy argues in her article “Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well” that tutoring is a process of mutual concern and understanding. Specifically, Murphy describes “empathetic understanding.” When the tutor (hereafter called Pablo) introduced himself to the writer, he was very warm and friendly, and asked, “So what are here for today? WAAAAIT. Let me guess. You have to write a portrait for English 1001.” Immediately the student smiled and said, “Ha, yea. How'd you know?” The initial connection between the tutor and the writer was apparent, and Pablo began the session on a positive vibe. Murphy says, “The person who is better able to communicate warmth, genuineness, and accurate empathy is more effective in interpersonal relationships no

matter the goal of the interaction.” By using a sense of humor and a “down-to-earthiness,” Pablo was effectively able to connect with the writer.

Once the session began, Pablo immediately wanted to set the agenda. The following is a transcript from the session (T=writer; P=Pablo):

T- Ok, first off, I’ve already approved this with the teacher.

P- Ok, what did you need to work on?

T- The teacher said I needed to add more details.

P- By the way, I know this assignment very well because I have worked with many students doing the same paper. Also, I’ve spoken to the teacher.

T- Oh ok.

P- Yea, have you thought about adding more physical details?

T- What do you mean?

P- Like I think you should start off paragraphs and sentences with a colloquial statement. Something everyone can relate to. For example, “Everyone knows how hard it is to wake up early in the morning.”

It was very clear from this transcript that the agenda would be to add more details to the story. Next, Pablo asked the writer to read her paper aloud. In chapter seven of Gillespie and Lerner’s *Peer Tutoring*, a tutor writes, “I knew that my job was to listen and address the text in terms of the assignment and higher-ordered concerns” (93). Once the writer began to read her paper aloud, Pablo did indeed focus on HOCs, such as adding more description and quotes. Such a suggestion is a step of provocative revision that Toby Fulwiler also advocates. The reason I included the transcript is to show how quickly an in-depth agenda was set. Gillespie and Lerner

remind us that setting the agenda quickly and efficiently is one of the most important steps in a conference. Pablo does a great job establishing the focus of the session.

Pablo and the writer connected, and it was apparent that the two were willing to work together on the paper to produce some type of improvement. Because of Pablo's constant praise of the writer's work, it was obvious that the writer's confidence soared. In his article "Learning to Praise," Donald Daiker reminds us, "Since positive reinforcement, or its lack, is so crucial to a student's level of writing apprehension, one way of reducing apprehension is by allowing students to experience success with writing." Pablo did a great job of reaffirming and praising the writer. He said, "I'm really pleased. You can tell that you clearly interviewed this person. His voice really comes out in your writing." Instantly, the writer smiled and thanked him. Any concerns she had for the paper were eased. Daiker also says, "Even with relative standards, a commitment to positive reinforcement, and perhaps a gimmick or two, most of us could benefit from some practice in praise." If we learn how to praise, we can make sure that the writer leaves with a positive feeling. At the end of the session, Pablo said, "I think this paper is very good." He then proceeded to offer suggestions.

I think it is very important to note that Pablo offers suggestions with praise. Praise is excellent, but criticism is necessary also. For example, Pablo praised the overall paper, but he made it very clear to the writer that she needed to work on her commas and fragments. Although the typical handbook defines fragments as "usually reflect[ing] incomplete and sometimes confused thinking," Muriel Harris believes that tutors should "let the natural growth of late blooming structures occur and not to stamp out every budding shoot which doesn't instantly appear in full flower" ("Mending the Fragmented Free Modifier"). Many times Pablo would show the writer where she made a mistake in her comma usage. Toward the end of the paper,

however, the writer was finding her own comma mistakes. The session was like a microcosm of what Harris had in mind. Harris meant that over time (as in a lengthy period of months, perhaps years), a writer would develop his usage skills. In this session, the writer progressively improves and begins pointing out her own mistakes. In this sense, the writer follows Harris's description of a "budding shoot which doesn't instantly appear in full flower." It was a work in progress for the writer.

The end/the few minutes immediately following the session were very informative. With about five minutes left in the session, Pablo asked the writer, "Is there anything else you would like to work on? We have about five minutes left." The writer said, "No, not really. But like, is this an A-worthy paper?" Pablo quickly answered, "I cannot tell you that." In *Peer Tutoring*, Gillespie and Lerner remind us that if a writer demands a letter grade, "tell the writer that to guess at a grade is against our policy and that we will get in trouble if we do it" (172). The student did not make a fuss about Pablo's refusal to tell her, but Pablo effectively conveyed that he could not make that kind of judgment.

After the session, I quickly spoke to Pablo about what I observed. I told him that I noticed he did not write down notes as the student read her paper. Rather, he would stop her, take his pencil, write on her actual paper, and explain as she read. He told me that he is a very directive tutor. He said, "Nondirective tutoring looks good on paper, but it's quite theoretical. When you begin working in the tutoring, you will see that there is not enough time to tutor with a nondirective approach." I wondered to myself: "Will I abandon the approaches I have learned all semester? Hopefully not." Gillespie and Lerner include a journal of a tutor's concerns about tutoring who says, "I soon discovered that [tutoring] was simple enough to understand, but not simple enough to practice immediately" (93). Clearly, it is easy for me to sit here and question

Pablo's tutoring strategies. But he has been doing this a long time. He knows what works for him. Since I have yet to tutor, I **must** abide by the theoretical approach of nondirective tutoring. As of now, it is all I know. Once I begin working as a tutor, I will see that it is, as Gillespie and Lerner imply, easier **read** than done. I look forward to beginning my work as a tutor and gaining the experience needed to effectively and realistically work with writers. Enough with the theories. Bring on the writers.

As I moved from tutor to student teacher, I found myself saying, "Bring on the students."

Writing Center Strategies Applied to Secondary Classrooms

I have decided to include a brief description of four major strategies or issues in the collegiate writing center as a way to frame that same application in the secondary classroom. I firmly believe that writing is writing. Whether the teacher is helping the first year high school student, the first year college student, or the seventy-year-old at the nursing home, teaching writing is about guiding and encouraging.

Writing teacher Toby Fulwiler believes that "teaching writing is teaching re-writing" (194). Much of Fulwiler's research and experience working with writers is linked to writing centers for universities. He works closely with several first-year college students who are trying to adjust to the difficulties of having success in their writing at the collegiate level. He is convinced that "revision is the primary way that both thinking and writing evolve, mature, and improve...[he] no longer leave[s] revision to chance, happenstance, or writer whimsy. [Fulwiler] not only encourage[s] it, [he] provoke[s] it, emphasizing where, when, and how to do it." The

emphasis on his interactions, however, is to ensure that the writing always remains each student's own.

Strategy #1 Revisited: Breaking the Ice in the Secondary Classroom

The secondary classroom is a bit different. I had already established relationships with the students. By the time I assigned the paper, I had interacted with the students for approximately four weeks. They already had writing expectations set up by my mentor teacher. They are always required to include a heading, cannot be too flowery with their word choice, must always use proper register, and must always double space. Basically, they were expected to implement MLA qualities. While I did not deviate too much from the teacher's methodology, I did implement make clear my expectations that no one was to turn in anything he or she was not proud of. While I did not yet have my students' trust as the grader of their writer, a rapport was already established.

By the end of the school year, the secondary classroom differs from the writing center session because the writing teacher already has a good understanding of the student's writing practices, personality, and tendencies. As a student teacher, however, entrance into the secondary classroom was a new endeavor, and each student's writing abilities and personality was a blank canvas, one I needed to help paint and develop. In *Common Ground*, Kurt Spellmeyer calls ethnographers of experience "scholar/teachers who find out how people actually *feel*...[who] search for basic grammars of emotional life" (242). I had to immediately establish an emotional and professional relationship with my students. By reading through their pre-existing journals and skimming old tests, I gauged the competency level of the students with whom I would be working.

When I assigned the Personal Narrative Unit to students, I explained that the process would be a very personal one, both for the writers and for the teacher. Students were given the freedom to choose whatever they desired. Some students asked for suggestions from my mentor teacher, some from me, and others simply chose what their friends wrote about. I explained to students that I would be available at any step of the writing process. It was important to gain the students' trust. I feared they may not open up as much if they did not fully understand my personality or my "grading" difficulties.

To combat this fear, I assigned a small writing assignment. Students were to write a small journal entry describing an event in their life that they would like to share with me. The response was intentionally open-ended. After students turned them in, I made comments and assigned "letter grades" so students would have an idea of the Mr. Ebarb thought process. It showed the students the types of issues I like to address, and I was reassuring throughout my evaluation of their work. (While I did not record the grades, the students were initially under the impression that they would be held accountable, as I quickly realized points was a big motivational factor for them before I entered the classroom).

Applebee calls response to writing "the major vehicle for writing instruction, in all subject matter areas" (90). In the writing centers, we were prepared to work with any genre. While the secondary classroom is a bit different, it still stands that different students will have different writing styles. By responding to student writing on a personal note and showing students I was genuinely interested in not only their final drafts but also their entire growth and maturity during the writing process, I was effectively able to break the ice.

Strategy #2 Revisited: Having the Writer Read Aloud

One of the most important aspects of self-, peer-, and teacher-revision is making the writer read his or her own work aloud. In *The Practice of Writing*, Robert Scholes and Nancy Comley insist that “to refuse revision is to refuse thought itself” (16). Students must be willing to take ownership of their paper and feel they are the ultimate authority. The teacher gives the grade, but the student gives the effort and clarification.

To assess this strategy, students first set up a conference with me after I returned their first drafts. I commented on these drafts, offered suggestions, praised two or three aspects, and suggested two or three areas for improvement. Much of the feedback involved reminding students of guidelines of the paper (as seen on the rubric in the unit plan), such as length and use of Smiley Face Tricks. Students had a chance to read over my comments and set up a personal conference with me.

In these conferences, I politely asked students to read their papers aloud at my desk. These drafts were only around a half of a page to a page handwritten, so it was somewhat easier to complete more conferences in the time allotted during class. I explained, “You will catch some of your own mistakes if you read it out loud, and you might find that the flow you think makes sense in your head doesn’t make so much sense when read aloud.” Again, this is a great strategy for allowing the student to take ownership of his or her paper. I was merely the audience listening to a story that was very personal to the student. It was the student’s job to impress, educate, and entertain me.

After students completed their next drafts, the same protocol was used. I collected papers, wrote suggestions, praises, and concerns, and returned drafts. The students were assigned a partner whose work they would peer review. While the term “peer review” might suggest that the teacher’s role has somehow diminished, it is in fact true that the teacher’s responsibilities

multiply. By walking around the classroom I had to assume the role of ten to twelve writing coaches at one time. In “Professional Judgment in the Assessment of Creative Writing,” Danny Broderick observes that “peer group assessment is a key element of current teaching methodologies” (21). If students do not learn to interact with each other and each others’ writings, they are missing out on an opportunity to improve their own skills of self-analysis. Patricia Wooldridge agrees: “I believe that the use of peer assessment provides a vital support in the development of writing” (119).

After students were given a chance and more time to write a draft, I again made several comments and gave substantial feedback. Another personalized conference with me was set up so students could ask questions about previous mistakes, errors, and positive attributes of their paper. Professor Donald Murray of the University of New Hampshire meets with students for every paper. He tries to use what he calls the “listening eye” (Steward 46). “From prewriting conferences to explore ideas through other conferences over a succession of drafts, [Murray] teaches process, helping students help themselves ‘to find the need for focus, for shape, for form’” (47).

Strategy #3 Revisited: Giving Compliments

As mentioned previously, Donald Daiker advocates the use of praise to encourage student writing. I remember from my high school writing assignments when teachers would circle nothing but mistakes on my paper. One specific teacher had a number system. A “1” meant “Wow!” a “2” meant “good transition,” and a “3” meant “awkward.” Or at least it was something similar to that. The difficulty with analyzing the teacher’s comments was the chore of “translating” the numbers into a comment. While it was easier for the teacher to write a number,

students had to work even harder to visually see the praise. On the other end of the spectrum, though, many teachers have no hesitation circling mistakes. In a section called “The Red Pencil Blues” in their handbook for teaching in high school settings, Susan and Stephen Tchudi recognize that “bleeding on kids’ papers, [and] accentuating errors in crimson has negative effects on [student] writing” (177).

I applied one major rule throughout the entire process. I identified and clearly marked three **positive** traits of the paper before I acknowledged *any* mistakes, errors, or omissions. No matter how many mistakes I ultimately found, I always discovered that students, for the most part, have grasped at least two or three concepts well enough to be able to apply them completely to their papers. Student skills ranged from the use of an effective transition, an attention-grabbing introduction, a clear, concise thesis, a good use of the semicolon, a good sentence variation, or a conclusion that sums up the main idea of the discussion. Even if students correctly formatted their MLA heading and title, I made note of it. Students need to see that we, as teachers, are not here to bully them. We do not (or should not) take pleasure in seeing a student become upset or distraught over our feedback and comments.

Tchudi and Tchudi continue their discussion of teacher feedback by noting that “these days, English language arts teachers try to make their comments supportive and generally positive, and they try to focus the negative comments, perhaps choosing one particular item for discussion for each paper” (178). By identifying the positive attributes first, students have a rock of support on which they can lean. They are not cast away or brushed aside into the forest of ignorance. I effectively let them know that they were competent in some capacity. At the end of each paper, I wrote at least four sentences of feedback, encouragement, and criticism. In all cases, I began my blurb with a compliment. I do not mean to say that “sugarcoating” is an

effective strategy, but I do realize that beginning criticism with something not as harsh helps set up the reception of that criticism. One specific student, whom I will call Bud, told me, “Mr. Ebarb, I’m really glad you had something nice to say about my writing. No one has ever told me I was a good writer.” Even though he received a low C on his paper, he was encouraged and anxious to re-write to see how he might improve, thus garnering more positive feedback in his next draft.

It is important not to over-commit to commenting and providing praising feedback, though. Tchudi and Tchudi advise teachers to “skeptically assess the effects of comments on student papers, and grant students the right to ignore comments or act on them as they see fit” (179). They go on to say that “even the best-intended, psychopedagogically framed remarks are often misunderstood, misused, or ignored.” This is especially true with defensive writers. Many students corrected any grammatical mistake or reworded any sentences or phrases exactly as I had suggested. However, if I complimented a student for attempting to use a varied sentence structure in one place, but did not do the same three paragraphs later, the student was not fully aware there was a problem. I do not know if the mentality was, “Well, it was right here, so I will just keep it,” but sometimes that “sugarcoating” hindered the student’s ability to see the real problem. Praise is good, but it should be used with caution. The point must still always be made. If I noticed that a problem occurred more than three times throughout the remainder of the paper, I brought it to the student’s attention by writing a small note at the end. Multiple instances of the same problem are easy to identify.

Strategy #4 Revisited: Making the Writer Do the “Talking”

I want to make it clear that by “talking” I mean communicating in general. If a teacher writes a three-paragraph-long comment at the end of a student’s paper, the writer needs to equal those comments, either verbally or written. If the teacher talks too much or writes too much, the student is overwhelmed. There were many times during the process where I would write a list of four or five items students needed to work on, but I eventually shifted to two or three per draft. Students cannot focus on too many major issues at one time. They need guidance through two or three before they are confident enough to approach the four or five.

Tutors have the advantage of not issuing grades, thus putting students at ease about talking with them. In the classroom, however, my identity as teacher loomed over students, and they know the person with whom they are conferencing will ultimately decide their fate by issuing a grade. Still, there are strategies to use to help probe student responses. According to the Nichols Math and Science Tutoring Center website (and most writing center directors and analysts agree), the following strategies will help make the writer talk more than the tutor:

- When conferencing with students, start by establishing a comfortable interaction. Put the writer at ease by chatting a few moments and by starting the work session on a positive note (perhaps by identifying something about a draft that works well; perhaps commending the student on an interesting choice of topic).
- If possible, try not to set up a hierarchical or confrontational seating arrangement such as having the student sit on the other side of the desk. Try sitting next to each other so that you both can look at a paper.
- In any conversation with students, monitor your vocabulary so that you don’t use rhetorical jargon that may be familiar to you but not to most students. (If they don’t

understand “focus” or “coherence” or “comma splice,” they are not likely to let you know.)

- Ask open-ended questions and be sure to allow the student plenty of time to answer instead of quickly jumping in to answer your own question or relieve what seems to you like an awkward silence.
- Let the student do at least fifty percent of the talking. Articulating her concern or working through a muddy idea by herself will help the student figure out what she wants to write.
- Work with the whole student, not just the paper, and remember that writers are individuals who differ in many ways, including their writing processes.
- Ask the student to explain to you what her main idea is or what she thinks the assignment is asking her to do. Sometimes, a student is not aware of a misapprehension about what to write or doesn't realize that he has not yet focused sufficiently on a topic or narrowed it to a reasonable size.
- Use every opportunity (such as not writing too much on the paper) to let the student know he's the writer and he's in charge of deciding what to write.
- Don't try to accomplish too much in a conference or when grading the paper. Choose a few topics and quit before the student goes into information overload.
- Bring closure to a conference by asking the writer what she's planning to do next with the paper. Or summarize the content of what you both have talked about. Be sure to ask if there are any remaining unanswered questions relating to what you were talking about.

Students always knew that I wanted to be there with them. It was never a chore to sit, listen, and go over their paper **again** for the third or fourth time. A good paper is one that is

revised continually, and as soon as students realized how passionate I was about this concept, they were more apt to re-write. Like in the writing center, I never faced the writer as the “instructor.” I always made sure the student was next to me so we could both look at the paper together. Once students were comfortable, I made sure not to lose them by not overusing technical jargon about grammar and structure. While this does not mean that I lower my expectations and do not anticipate a particular student understanding a reference, I do understand that every learner is different and at his or her own level in the process of writing development.

As the authority figure in the classroom, it is difficult to be laid back with the writer while at the same time maintain order in the classroom. Often, some students would be wasting time or disrupting others while I was trying to conference, but after the first two conferencing session days, I learned that it is important to keep students busy with other work that in some capacity asks them to analyze their own or each others’ writings. By pairing them up and asking them to write one good thing they like about their partners’ work, one major problem, and a few areas of improvement, I wanted to ensure that students were actively engaged in the revision process without my monitoring.

I consciously tried to make sure the student was talking more than half of the time. One rule I tried to use was the ten-second rule. After asking a question or following up a question, or beginning a problem, I tried to allow at least ten seconds for the student to respond. This may seem like a long time, but if I was patient, often the student would have time to think of a response. Awkward silences occurred, but I would wait before I jumped in. This will let the student know that you are listening and expect him or her to participate (Alves de Lima).

Another way to make the writer talk more is to ask probing questions. This may seem logical and apparent, but sometimes it is very tempting (and easier) to steer a student the way I

want the student to go. Each paper is unique to a student, and it was never my job to take away that individuality. Rather, it was my job to help the writer's ideas grow and flourish, based on his or her experiences. A probing response forces the *tutor to listen carefully*, and pushes the *student to think* and move beyond the first statement. Here are some examples of these questions and comments:

<i>Clarifying</i>	Asking a student for more information or meaning, restate
Examples:	“What do you mean by that?” “Tell me more!” “Be more specific.” “Anything else?” “So what's an example of that?”
<i>Challenging</i>	Asking a student to justify, reflect, or think about answer
Examples:	“What are you assuming?” “How can that be?” “How would you do that?” “Are you sure?”
<i>Refocusing</i>	Asking a student to relate their answer to another idea or topic
Examples:	“How is that related to...” “If this were true, then what would happen if...”
<i>Prompting</i>	Giving a student a hint, or rephrasing a question to help lead to the answer after a student has tried and failed to understand
Examples:	“Let me put it another way...” “Here's a clue...” “So what's the first step?” “Remember when we talked about...”

Requesting Summary Asking for a restatement of what has just been said or learned, in terms of content and process.

Examples: “OK, now you explain back to me what we just said.” “Now you teach it to me.” “Summarize the steps for me.”

Strategy #5 Revisited: Responding Effectively to Writers

Applebee calls response to writing “the major vehicle for writing instruction, in all subject matter areas” (90). Without responding personally and clearly to student writing, there would be no hope in ever helping a student develop as a writer. By using my training in the writing center **and** trial and error, I discovered which problems were more important to stress initially and which ones could wait.

In her study *Response to Student Writing*, Freedman wanted to examine the nature of response teachers make and the impact that response has on students. Her surveys illustrated and supported three conditions for successful response to student writing: “Successful teachers...resist taking over the writing of their students”; they “communicate high expectations for all students”; and they provide plentiful help and support for students during the writing process (160). Her definition of response to writing included: teacher and peer written and oral responses, not only to final products but also to drafts in progress, and to the thinking that students do as they participate in discussion and generation of ideas in preparation for writing.

What is the most important part of responding to students’ writings? Based on my experiences, the concern must be with higher order concerns first. Everything else that Freedman advocates, such as the high expectations and the insistence on connecting pre- and post-drafts, is important, but the paper and writer need to have the main problems addressed first. Thomas

Reigstad and Donald MacAndrew mention the importance of discussing higher order concerns before lower order concerns, or as they call them, “HOCs before LOCs.” As Gillespie and Lerner explain, “Higher order concerns are the big issues in the paper, ones that aren’t addressed by proofreading or editing for grammar and word choice” (35). By helping students with problems like sentence flow, thesis development, transition sentences, clear conclusion, organization, and focus, I effectively tried to establish a method that students could use on their own.

Gillespie and Lerner continue to say, “The last act of rewriting must be proofreading, a check for mechanical errors in spelling and punctuation” (17). Or as Stephen North advises, we must build the house before we paint it. It has always been difficult for me to disregard comma splices, misused semicolons, subject/verb agreement, or subject/pronoun agreement. I simply cannot ignore the misplaced period on the outside of the quotation marks or the non-capitalized word “english.” These are problems that should not be addressed in the initial stages of conferencing, however. I am guilty of circling almost all grammatical mistakes in students’ paper in my Personal Narrative Unit Plan, but I convinced myself I would go back and explain the major rules. I made a class list of overall problems that I tried to address, in hopes of culling the personal, repeated questions. To an extent this worked, but students still had individual questions.

The following two images (1 and 2) are notes I made while grading students’ second and third drafts. I made a “Top Ten List of Problems” that I wanted to discuss with the entire class. I noticed that almost everything I addressed was a lower order concerns. Only two or three notes were related to ideas such as adding more detail or improving organization. In the sense of providing meaningful feedback to help with the **whole** paper, I feel I failed the class as a whole.

Image 1

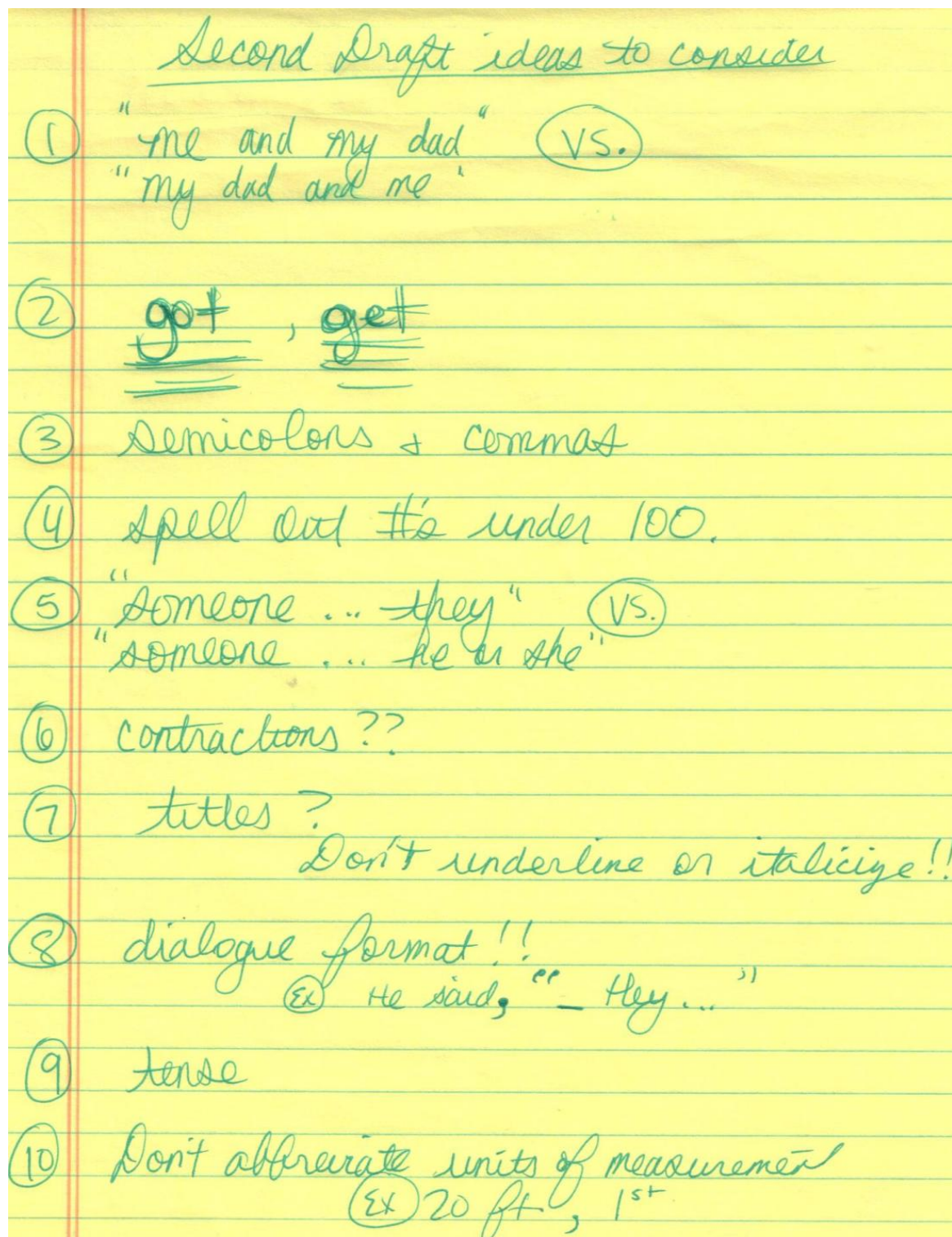
★ **TYPED, DOUBLE SPACED** 2/14/09

What to address in personal narratives -

- ① ecstatic - not estatic or ectatic (sp.)
- ② SDT! WC = word choice (VC)
 - Show examples of student writing that lacks detail.
 - Try not to show writing sample from class in which student is in.
- ③ formatting dialogue
 - show Marissa's.
- ④ Identify I's
- ⑤ omit "get", "got"
 - * "seems"
- ⑥ reconsider # breaks
 - some a bit too long?
- ⑦ tense - present seems more effective
- ⑧ "excited" vs. "exited" (sp.)
- ⑨ "adrenaline" running through our veins"
 - Cliche
- ⑩ vocab - just b/c you use it doesn't mean you've shown me anything

TITLES?

Image 2



In a 1990 study, Sperling provides an analysis of one teacher's conferences with students about their writing. She writes that "participating in the explicit dialogue of teacher-student conversation, students collaborate in the often implicit act of acquiring and developing written language" (282). Like those of the university writing center, the conferences Sperling's observed had a range of purposes: "to plan future text,...to clarify the teacher's written comments..., to give feedback on texts on which there were no written comments," and "to cover concerns tangential...to those above" (289).

Conclusion

Stephen North, one of the leading figures in writing center discourse, explains certain advantages held by the writing consultant: "we are here to talk to writers" (440); "we are not the teacher" [as the student seeks us out] (442), and "we can play with options" (443). He emphasizes that students come to the writing center to write; they want to be there in almost every case. The writing center can function to intensify classroom experiences (440). But the crux of North's "idea" is that [tutors in the writing center] are first and foremost professional, and that [they] take ownership of the space and the work done in it, resolving simply to guide and support writers as they write. He concluded in 1984, "As a profession I think we are holding on tightly to attitudes and beliefs about the teaching and learning of writing that we thought we had left behind" (434). However, ten years later, after observing the changing and shifting role of the writing center, North did an about-face when he revisited his earlier polemic with a much more even-tempered acknowledgment of the need for closer relationships between classroom and center.

By breaking the ice and making students feel at ease, by asking the student to take ownership of the paper by reading aloud his or her paper, by praising and complimenting

students and their writing, and by knowing which issues to address and respond to and assist with first, I was effectively able to translate the same strategies I used in the university writing center in the secondary classroom. While the situations are different, students who are timid about their writings will have reservations. They expect the teacher (in the writing center's case, the teacher *figure*), to be someone who is authoritative and directive. But I wanted to know what happened when *directive* became *non-directive*.

Throughout my own secondary experience four years ago, teacher feedback was quite directive. Comments were written on my paper, and I was expected to correct all errors. I wanted to avoid this trap when I assigned the personal narratives to the students in my secondary classroom. In my conferences and through my responses, I wanted to explore how effective the step-by-step, written-in-class, conference-with-me approach would be. Writing is writing, I assumed, and teaching writing is teaching writing. Ultimately, the more drafts students wrote, the better the writing became. This was to be expected. The more we stretch and lift weights in the weight room, the more muscles we accumulate. Improvement through practice – an age-old idea with some very contemporary, convenient results.

This investigation has taught me so much about my own pedagogies. As a student tutor and student teacher, the experience of teaching writing to people similar in age to me was very unique. Many of my own peers who are in education have expressed uneasiness when it comes to teaching writing because they, as one girl has said, “do not feel completely confident telling other people what and how to write.” But as I have tried to present, teaching writing is a collaborative effort. It is not about dictating my beliefs and expecting students to write how I want them to write. As the teacher, there is the need to guide, but not necessarily lead. Patience

with the writer, along with a sense of trust, will help the teacher-learner experience go a long way.

Further Investigation

At the completion of this investigation, I am currently teaching and responding to students' drafts of an extended definition. I abandoned the step-by-step and conferencing steps to see how well students responded merely to reading the directions sheet and conforming to the rubric. I am always intrigued by what students can accomplish. I have learned never to underestimate them, as they constantly surprise me. I am a firm believer that expectations should *never* be lowered in the classroom, whether it is about writing or reading.

I notice that the idea of audience is especially important for students in their writing. Numerous research suggests that students who know the intended audience is the teacher whom will issue a grade tend to write more completely and thoughtfully than those who assume the audience is their peers. I hope to vary the intended audience and explore the possibilities and ramifications of changing to whom the students are writing.

By asking students to write another paper under my supervision, it has been a bit easier introducing the idea of writing personally to me. They trust me much more than they did a month ago, and there is a genuine relationship – one of trust, compassion, and entertainment. Even though the writing center sessions last thirty minutes and conferencing sessions in the secondary classroom may only last ten to fifteen minutes, teaching writing is still teaching re-writing. This investigation is still on-going, and I hope that it will be a staple in my reflections as I embark on the **real** world of teaching in the fall.

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