SPIDER WRITING

Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Digital Video Project Premieres on Campus
by Joe Essid, Writing Center Director

For the last several years, I worked closely on honing the training of tutors and Writing Fellows with Dr. Dona J. Hickey, Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences, who founded our Writing-Across-the-Curriculum program and who served as its director for several years. Dr. Hickey and I had been aware that the students enrolled in our sections of English 376, Composition Theory and Pedagogy, could not be expected to master the nuances of peer tutorials after only a semester of apprenticing in our Writing Center.

In Eng. 376, students work one hour per week in the Center, read "mock" student papers on which they write commentary, and work closely with peers in a section of Core or a general-education course. This practice improves the students' tutoring skills, but it still does not prepare them for every possible "problem" tutorial. We knew that more training would be needed, not to replace our face-to-face training in the Writing Center, but to provide the extra training for situations that might not occur before a new Writing Fellow was assigned to work for a faculty member.

For this reason, Dr. Hickey and I began to envision "Training for Tough Tutorials," a series of technology-enhanced training activities. We had sketched out a plan: interactive menus, writing exercises, and a "choose-your-own-adventure" format of digital-video clips. With these ideas in mind, we applied to the Program for Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness for funding.

We received an initial grant to purchase a high-end Mac system for editing Web pages and images, and peripherals to process and store the resulting files. We borrowed a Canon XL-1 camera from the Language Lab, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Andrew Ross. Later, a second PETE grant provided a Canon GL1 video camera. As we began to boot up the computers and experiment with the cameras, we already had a few important goals. We wanted users' experience with the project to be as pleasant as a good peer tutorial, when practice and theory combine. We hoped that our suggestions for effective tutorial strategies would not be seen as mandates. We would not offer a "fix-it shop" approach; our Writing Center and WAC Program adhere to North's dictum that peer tutoring should produce better

The Scenarios:
* angry writer
* writer wanting the tutor to make a "quick fix" to her paper
* "nontraditional" (older) writer
* writer not wanting to make any changes
* writer needing grammatical help
* non-native speaker of English
* writer with an offensive paper
* friend of the tutor
* demoralized writer
* student-athlete
* writer with a strong paper

writers, not better papers. At this point, a few specially trained Writing Fellows and I began to design test pages and graphics for what would become a complete Web site to host the

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project. Students in sections of Composition Theory and Pedagogy designed the content that went inside this framework. They settled on five scenarios, and in the Fall of 2000, another group of 376 students designed six more scenarios.

For each simulated tutorial, Eng. 376 students designed questions for an interactive writing exercise. This last part was crucial for better training: at various points, tutors would be asked to make decisions about what they might do at that moment and submit their answers to the course instructors. The Web browser then shows a likely outcome. At each step of the way, tutors can review earlier video clips and other materials.
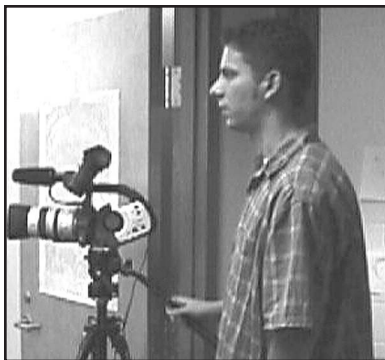
The Process of Making the Videos

After the student teams had selected the scenarios, they divided the tasks for the filming. Two students worked as actors, another provided the paper (and edited in errors) that became the basis for the tutorial. Two other students wrote scripts and a variety of story-boards that chart the course of the tutorial, and at every point where a tutor could try a different tactic, the designers sketched out the results. We then shot film for each panel on the story-boards. For the day of filming, we has

asked the actors to study--but not memorize--the dialogue in the scripts. Camera-operators Julie-Ann McMillan and Matt Perrine asked the students to improvise dialogue for each scene sketched out in the storyboards, paying careful attention to any "rich bits" of dialogue from the scripts and using only those words verbatim.

I had not expected such good acting from the students. Their success probably came from their experience as tutors. By the day of filming, everyone in Eng. 376 had worked as an apprentice tutor for nearly a semester. This on-the-job experience let the tutors simulate the give-and-take of a difficult tutorial very effectively.

What We Could and Could Not Do

Our intention had been to capture many different approaches to a difficult moment in a tutorial. We found, however, that our story-boards were not detailed enough. While filming we asked the actors to brainstorm, and they quickly devised other scenes that we then shot. This added some depth, but we still did not achieve the "choose your own adventure" multiplicity of outcomes we had originally imagined. We also could not capture every possible outcome in a given situation. Following our own best instincts as peer tutors, we decided that we would present common outcomes for given tutorial strategies.

In Fall, 2001, Dr. Hickey and I were delighted to receive Richmond's award for Teaching with Technology for our work on the project.

As future tutor-trainees work with the videos, both here at Richmond

and around the world on the internet, we look forward to learning more about how these videos enhance their training and their effectiveness as tutors.

Work Cited:

North, S. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English*, 46.5 (September 1984): 433-46.

> *"Training for Tough Tutorials" is at:*
> **www.richmond.edu/~eng376/training**
> *Stay tuned for the latest scenarios and faster off-campus access when the project moves to the Writing Center's new Web server in 2002.*

Bridging Gaps Between Cultures: Richmond's Director of ESL Services

by Terry Dolson,
Writing Fellows Coordinator

Just walking across campus can be a challenge if you are not "from here." Ordering lunch can be a minefield: do you ask for " 3 milks" or "3 milk" or maybe something completely different—three cartons of milk? And if you are from France, your first question just may be "Why would an adult drink milk at all?"

For many students at UR, Nuray Grove is the answer to their prayers. Originally from Ankara, Turkey, Nuray knows what it is like to try to step in to the American culture. From culture shock to the complexities of American grammar, Nuray has been there herself and lived to tell the story.

Ms. Grove fills a new position here: Director of ESL Services. Working with Writing Center Director Joe Essid and Dean of International Education, Uliana

Gabara, Nuray assists ESL (English as a Second Language) students in a variety of ways. She tutors ESL students individually, helping them with their writing

Nuray Grove: Director of ESL Services

and pronunciation. She also teaches the English Language Institute held in the summer for entering international students. During the school year, Nuray teaches several classes for the English department, including "ESL and American Culture" and "Expository Writing."

Nuray hopes to assist students further by not only helping international students to understand American culture, but also by helping American students and professors to understand students from other countries. She explains that so often it is the unspoken message a person presents that can seem "rude" to someone from another culture. She tells one story as an example: "Something as simple as a guy saying "hi" to a young woman from Turkey can cause a misunderstanding when she responds 'Do I know you?' He feels insulted and embarrassed. She is confused because, though she has met him, she does not know him well, and in Turkey you would only greet good friends in such a manner." Misunderstandings like this can cause international students and Ameri-

can students to "give up" on each other; they form separate groups and don't mingle much. Nuray feels this is a great loss. "We could move from simple diversity to real mixing and create a great synergy if we could understand one another better," she says. And Nuray has lots of ideas about how to do this. She hopes to use such tools as videos and workshops for faculty and students to help her teach the details of different cultural expectations. Awareness of the unspoken assumptions of each culture may be the key for international students and the Richmond community as well.

Watch for Ms. Grove's workshops in the upcoming months, as well as articles by her in upcoming newsletters. And be sure to send international students to see her. They'll be grateful that you did!

Just Call Me Socrates
by Ann Chu, Writing Fellow

One of the most difficult issues I face when meeting with students is how to help them improve their writing without improving it *for* them. They usually come to the meeting with the expectation that we as writing fellows will tell them directly how to change their papers so they will have an 'A' quality paper in their hands as they leave. To guard against that happening, I usually adopt the tactic of asking a million questions instead of offering any answers. That way, they reach their own conclusions and put their own thoughts into their writing.

During one particular session this semester, my student was having

a particularly hard time articulating his thoughts about knowledge in the Bible and Rousseau. I was using my typical method of asking endless questions to help him form his ideas, but that strategy appeared not to be working so well. He'd often go off in a totally different direction with his answers than where I was hoping to take our discussion, leaving me clueless about how to communicate what I wanted him to understand without actually telling him what he needed to know. After one long hour, he finally left the session with some general ideas on how to support the argument he had formulated in his rough draft. He also left me with the fear that I had ruined forever his desire to write another Core paper.

A couple of weeks later, it was time for him to come in for his second paper. After a few minutes, it seemed that we were headed for another long session of discussing Socrates and Chuang-Tsu. I sat there struggling over how to help him express his ideas more concisely in his writing while he struggled over why he thought Socrates' method of philosophy was so effective. All of the sudden, he became excited and said, "I know! Socrates asked questions to make people think more instead of telling them the answer right off the bat--kind of like how you keep asking me questions along the way to make me think further and further." As surprised as I was, I wasn't sure if I was happier about having been compared to Socrates or him finally understanding the main point of his own argument.

From that comment, I decided maybe I didn't need to find another method of working with my students, at least not this particular one. He left after the hour-long session, still without a concrete written product, but at least with some substantial ideas rattling around waiting to be organized into a paper. This experience made me realize that maybe sometimes it's okay for me not to have seen a student achieve an 'A' paper if at the least I helped to improve his way of thinking. It is, after all, the main ingredient of excellent writing.

Apostrophes: A Writing Tip
by Terry Dolson,
Writing Fellows Coordinator

Often, punctuation that seems the most simple can trip up a writer. Take the apostrophe, for instance. We all know the rule—we learned it in "grammar school" after all! The apostrophe (**'**) does one of two things: shows possession or takes the place of letters in a contraction. But the problem lies with the fact that usually, not always, -'s shows possession. When your everyday singular noun, dog, has a bone, it is the **dog's bone**. If the dog shares it with his brother dog, it is the **dogs' bone**. If each dog has his own bone, then there will be fewer dogfights, but be careful not to trip on the **dogs' bones**! Maybe you remember that if the plural noun is irregular and doesn't end in -s,(like "mice" and

"men") then we are back to -'s as in "the **mice's tails**." But to complicate things further, some singular nouns already end in -s, so we would admire **Lois's shoes.** This last situation causes some angst in the grammar world. Some experts feel that if there are too many -s's already, then just go with the apostrophe, as in **Jesus'** sandals. Diana Hacker in *A Writer's Reference* says either choice is acceptable, but Michael Strumpf in *The Grammar Bible* reminds us that "…the word Williams's is pronounced in the same manner as Williams." Most reasonable folks would agree this is a gray area . For specific odd cases that pop up, the best course is to look in your favorite grammar handbook.

But many of the problems we see in novice writing and in our own early drafts have to do with the second part of the rule: contractions. Ever have trouble with the its/it's dilemma? Many students do. But one useful suggestion is to separate the homonyms when reminding students of apostrophe pitfalls. Some experts maintain that always presenting them together can result in further muddling the distinction. Instead, try presenting the distinction as shown in the lists at the end.

And what about when you have a word or phrase that stumps you—possessive or not possessive? Hacker, considering loosely implied ownership like "tree's roots and a day's work" suggests: "…try turning it into an *of* phrase: the roots of the tree and the work of a day." If you can turn it around and use "of" then the noun is possessive.

Always remember grammarian Douglas Cazort's cardinal rule "Write first; edit later." These fine points of punctuation deserve consideration, but remember that it isn't worth interrupting the concentration necessary for getting thoughts on paper. First things first, and punctuation last! Or, as e.e. cummings says: "Since feeling is first/who pays any attention/ to the syntax of things/ will never wholly kiss you…"

List 1
troublesome CONTRACTIONS:
  it's = it is   they're = they are
  you're = you are   who's = who is

List 2
POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS that do not require apostrophes :
  his, hers, yours, ours,
  theirs, its, whose

List 3:
troublesome POSSESSIVE PRO-NOUNS:
  its, their, your, whose

SPRING 2002 WAC Program "LEARNING LUNCHES" for faculty

Tuesday, Feb. 20, 12:30-1:30 "Writing Good Assignments"

Well written assignments lead to better student writing. Find out what to do--and not to do--before crafting your next syllabus.

Wednesday, March 20, 12:30-1:30 "Effective Commentary Strategies"

Learn how to respond to student writing to balance assessment and learning while encouraging revision.

Both lunches will be held in the Dean's Conference Room, Boatwright Administrative Wing. E-mail Terry Dolson (tdolson@richmond.edu) to reserve a spot.