

when writers sit alone at the word processor, they are constantly connected to the society in which they live and write, not just by the socioculturally constructed language they use, but also by the memory that supplies them with culturally derived issues, ideas, language structures, and rhetorical strategies. Writers present their ideas and perspectives in finished pieces they think of as "theirs," when in reality writing is always "theirs/ours": the writer's and the culture's.

Writers and writing are also part of the wider political reality of their world. The idea that written language is part of the political structure may surprise some people, but when writers write they make all kinds of political decisions. Take this book: It is a political act as much as it is a written act or an educational act. We take a political stance just by talking about tutoring, a form of teaching and learning that runs counter to the dominant lecture-and-test form. We are promoting a practice—teaching writing by tutoring writers one-to-one—that reduces the power hierarchy of teacher over student, that sees teaching as best done in collaboration with the learner. These are radical ideas that call power structures into question, a political act for sure. And tutoring is effective, thereby promoting writing ability and the benefits it can bring (school diplomas and college degrees, office promotions, higher grades) for a larger group than the traditional lecture-and-test setting might. This can be threatening to those in power.

Writing is political in more aspects than just the topic the writer chooses. The stance a writer takes with the audience is political, too. We could have written this book as distant experts, university professors, but we've tried to write it from the more democratic stance that we know a good deal about tutoring writing and want to share it with people who, like us, want to help improve others' writing. We aimed for a stance and language that are accessible, helpful, even motivating. We want this book to help writing improve in classrooms, offices, and homes, not to be just another professional publication.

The writing process, then, looks like this: Recursive stage-process activities—prewriting, planning, writing, hesitating, revising, scrapping, and rewriting—occur as the writer's mental and linguistic processes and components cook—generating, translating, and reviewing the text so far and the rhetorical situation (all derived from memory)—all in the context of the sociocultural and political context of *this* writer with *this* piece of writing. The final piece is that this process varies among writers—and within individual writers on different days as they work with different topics, types of writing, audiences, and purposes. And then the tutor enters, smiling because he knows just how complex what he is about to undertake really is.

The Tutoring Process

The Priority of Concerns

There is an overriding priority of concerns in most tutoring sessions. Since all tutoring sessions are geared toward improving a piece of writing within a reasonable time limit and the constraints of the writer's energy level, more serious problems should be addressed first. We set up a two-tier hierarchy of higher order concerns (HOCs) and lower order concerns (LOCs). As the names imply, HOCs are responsible for the more serious problems in a piece of writing, while LOCs are responsible for less serious but still important problems.

HOCs are the features of a piece of writing that exist beyond the sentence level; they include clarity of thesis or focus, adequate development and information, effective structure or organization, and appropriate voice or tone—all important aspects of a piece of writing. LOCs are the features within a sentence, at the level of individual words and punctuation; they include sentence structure and variety, punctuation, grammar and usage, and spelling, elements often made overly important by a society obsessed with correctness.

Three Tutoring Options

Although the basic structure of most tutorial sessions is similar, every encounter with a writer demands an individualized response by the tutor. This book provides reasonable procedures for tutoring sessions, but we encourage tutors to remain flexible with writers and to acquire a tutoring style with which they are comfortable. By observing and interviewing master tutors at work, Tom Reigstad (1980) has identified three tutoring options: *student-centered*, *collaborative*, and *teacher-centered*. Tutors who are familiar with these options can borrow from any one at any moment during a tutoring session. We recommend the student-centered and collaborative options as being most productive with most writers, but the teacher-centered option has its place in certain circumstances and with certain writers.

Student-centered tutoring. A student-centered tutoring style is desirable because it encourages the writer to do most of the talking and most of the work. The writer even determines the direction of the session and initiates movement to each new phase. The tutor listens a great deal, especially early in the session, asks a few questions, and contributes personal recollections and associations to add to the writer's discovery and development of the subject. Student-centered tutorials are conducted informally, with the writer treated as the

tutor's conversational equal. The tutor relies on open-ended and probe-and-prompt questions to draw the writer out to discuss the piece and the process that led to it. The writer then initiates discussion about the issues she sees as problems in the piece, and the tutor suggests strategies for improving the work.

Collaborative tutoring. Collaborative tutoring allows the tutor to maintain a flexible posture. The tutor encourages the writer, often with open-ended and probe-and-prompt questions, to engage in off-the-paper, exploratory talk and to expand upon undeveloped themes in the paper. As a consequence, the relationship between tutor and writer changes from teacher-student to converser-converser several times during the tutorial. The tutor also moves from talk focused on the paper to off-the-paper talk, then brings the conversation back to the draft by encouraging the student to include ideas from the conversation in the piece. The tutor and writer share equally in the conversation, the problem solving, and the decision making. In collaborative tutoring, however, it is the tutor who initiates the move to a new phase and who usually identifies problem areas on which to focus. A great deal of conference time is spent talking about the writer's composing processes or about information in the draft or the ideas that grow out of it.

Teacher-centered tutoring. Sometimes time constraints, the nature of the writer, or the nature of the piece dictate that the tutor become more like a traditional teacher, adopting a teacher-centered tutoring style that is direct and that sets the tutor up as an authority and expert. Even though the ultimate goal of a tutoring session is to help the writer, not the piece of writing, there are occasions where a teacher-centered approach is appropriate and valuable. In this type of tutorial, the student sits more passively as the tutor reads through the piece and, often pen in hand, asks questions about mechanical errors, supplying alternatives and the reasons for them when the writer isn't forthcoming about them. The tutor dominates the talk, relying on closed, leading, or yes/no questions, and little of the talk is off-the-paper. The teacher-centered tutor issues directives for revising both HOCs and LOCs.

Tutoring as Chaos, Complexity, and Fuzziness

Tutoring often is complex, seems chaotic, and ends in fuzziness. Some who look at tutoring might criticize it for being so; they might call for more deliberateness, directness, and definition. But there is no need to

move in that direction. In fact, if recent scientific theories are right (Hall 1991; Waldrop 1992; Kosko 1993), there might be a real advantage to keep tutoring full of chaos, complexity, and fuzziness. Scientists have developed chaos theory, complexity theory, and fuzzy logic to explain issues in the natural world that were previously difficult to understand, and these theories give us useful metaphors for understanding what happens in tutoring sessions.

The chaos of tutoring writing. Chaos theory asks us to replace the central metaphor of our world and its workings; the world is no longer the Newtonian clock with its cogwheels and levers, rational and predictable: the machine, the computer, the robot. Chaos theory suggests metaphors that are more indeterminate, unpredictable, and random, such as turbulent rivers, weather, and smoke, and demonstrates that exact prediction is impossible in complex systems. One of us once had a predraft conference with a seventh-grade writer who wanted something to write about. When questioned about what he liked, he replied, "WWF wrestling." The tutor said, "Why not write about that?" And the writer did, for the next nine months of the school year, producing the *Wednesday Wrestling Weekly* every week. A conference of less than a minute led to nine months of writing.

We ask tutors to be aware that chaos never repeats itself. When tutors deal with the same writing problems in different pieces—even if it is the same problem in a piece written by the same writer on the same day—exact repetition almost never occurs in a tutoring session.

We train our tutors to have interpersonal skills and a toolbox of strategies that will give them the versatility to move across no-repeat sessions. One of us remembers a tutor saying, "If it's Benny, it's organization. But we never seem to go at it the way we did last time." Chaos theory tells us not to even expect repetition in a system that's as complex as tutoring writing is. Tutoring is not a matter of applying preformed thoughts and actions to the present situation as much as it is of developing a repertoire of interpersonal and pedagogical skills that put the tutor in a general state of readiness.

The complexity of tutoring writing. Complex systems are said to be incompressible—so much so that the thing itself is its own shortest description. Try to describe one day in New York City. We bet that you'll soon throw up your hands and say, "Ahh, just go there for a day and see!" So it is with tutoring. Ask an experienced tutor how he tutors and you'll open the floodgates to hours of stories and strategies and theories. The best way to describe tutoring is to *do* tutoring, and then to talk and try some more. To be able to fully describe tutoring

would freeze it and reduce the dynamic diversity that's essential to keeping the system at the edge of chaos, the place of highest potential for learning.

Finally, complex systems can constantly adapt to the environment and its changes. Actions and structures emerge as a result of these adaptations as the interactions of a system's components give rise to new characteristics on the macro or global level. So it is in tutoring: A tutoring session shows emergent adaptation as the session is negotiated and defined through the conversation of tutor and writer. The interactions of writer, piece, and tutor create the overall characteristic of the session, be it dull, valuable, confused, or energetic. As the complex tutoring system operates, adaptations further its progress, create its value, and color its reality for tutor and writer.

The fuzziness of tutoring writing. Fuzzy logic also gives insights into the nature of tutoring by stressing that the world is not right or wrong, one or zero, black or white, but rather shades of gray—not exact, but fuzzy. Fuzzy logic was developed for areas where scientific exactness interfaces with human judgment and emotions. In the fuzzy world, the fuzzy principle rules: Everything is a matter of degree. Bivalent, either/or thinking often makes sense in math and science, but human activity is full of multivalent understandings. Fuzzy logic gives us a perspective from which to see how important shades of gray are in the world of human interactions.

In tutoring there is no right or wrong answer; rather, there is a helpful and reasonable dialogue about the writer's piece. The tutor doesn't lay down rules; he draws out the writer to clarify steps that might improve the student's writing process or written product. Tutoring writers is a fuzzy job about a fuzzy process. The writer needs to learn that the actions she takes in drafting or revising may be the best actions to a degree—a fuzzy degree. The tutor needs to learn that his actions during tutoring are also fuzzy, guiding the writer to a degree, empowering her to participate in setting the session's agenda and to sometimes take the lead. Tutoring sessions are shades of gray in actions and outcomes, and that is good, that is human.

Body Language and the Tutoring Environment

Polished tutors are aware of the messages given by their posture, gestures, and tone of voice, and they learn to manipulate those three areas to ensure the messages are positive. Posture, because it is often seen and assessed from a distance, is the first message the tutor sends to the writer. The tutor should adopt a posture that is alert but

relaxed. If the tutor is overly attentive, the writer may perceive it as nervousness, insecurity, or even anger; if the tutor is too relaxed, the writer may take it as indifference or fatigue. In classrooms, writing centers, and offices, tutors should look approachable and never suggest with posture that their own work is more pressing than the tutoring session. The rule for posture is: Look available. Once the tutoring session is underway, the tutor can lean in a bit to show interest and connection.

The tutor's gestures are constantly assessed by the writer. At the first moment of interaction, the tutor should establish eye contact and smile (but remember that eye contact is much less frequent in some cultures than it is in America). Once tutoring is underway, the tutor can nod and use back-channel vocalizations like "yeah" and "uh-huh" to reinforce the nod, showing attention and interest. The tutor should scrupulously avoid gestures and actions that the writer might read as inattention, boredom, or displeasure, such as folded arms, looking past the writer at other people or events, taking a phone call, looking at a clock or watch, yawning, fidgeting, doodling, drumming fingers, and tapping a pen.

The writer reads the tutor's tone of voice, so the tutor should strive for a tone that is both friendly and professional, approachable and efficient. If the tutor sounds harsh, the writer may be intimidated or put off. If the tutor is too warm, the writer may assume that nothing directly useful will happen.

Tutors can use posture, gesture, and tone of voice to send messages that sharpen their tutorial effectiveness. But these messages can be undermined if the environment itself sends different messages. For obvious reasons, the tutoring space should be ample, comfortable, well lighted, and even cheery. In writing centers and offices, the importance of tutoring writing can be communicated powerfully and immediately by the institutional and organizational energy that has gone into the tutoring environment. The environment also communicates by how well it is stocked with writing tools such as computers, printers, software, pens, paper, and reference books.

We would expect a writing center to score high in these areas since tutoring writing is its central mission. Many elementary classrooms set up a tutoring space that's like a learning center or writing place—a separate, private, well-stocked work area with several small tables or desks arranged in pairs. In secondary or college classrooms, the back row of desks can be reserved for writers and their tutors, with pairs moving to the tutoring row when a writer feels a conference is necessary. In classrooms at any level, the entire class can be involved in a writing workshop, making tutoring an organic part of the whole

classroom. In an office, a tutoring center can be established at a table or desk that writer and tutor can move to as necessary, or a tutor can have an L- or U-shaped desk with one "arm" reserved for working with the writers who approach. At home, although the kitchen table is probably the favorite place, a separate table or desk can be set up if space allows. There are two last considerations that apply to all tutoring environments: The tutor should sit next to the writer or both should sit at a corner so that both can see the draft, and, whenever possible, a computer should be nearby so that on-screen tutorials are a possibility.

Chapter Five

Tutoring When the Writer Does Not Have a Draft

Sometimes a writer needs help with the writing from ground zero, because he has only the jumbled beginnings of a draft, has not gotten anything written down yet, or has no idea what to write about. The tutor's primary role at this stage is to provide expert help with pre-drafting or prewriting. This chapter suggest a variety of questions the tutor can ask and a variety of strategies she can suggest as she guides the writer through discovering a subject to write about, elaborating on the newly discovered subject with information and ideas, and shaping the information and ideas into the beginnings of a draft.

When a Writer Needs Help Finding a Topic

Tutor Questions

What's the assignment?

Do you have a subject? [If the writer answers "no," ask these questions—]

What have you been thinking or reading about lately?

What are you curious to know more about?

Strategies

Writing territories. When a writer has no idea what to write about, suggest that he take ten minutes to generate a list of "writing territories" (Atwell 1998)—that is, a personalized, diverse, and specific list of