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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of teacher-written curriculum publications launched by the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP), each focusing on a different aspect of the teaching of composition. In it a college professor presents a personal narrative of his experience in a BAWP summer institute and how he applied the techniques learned at the institute to his freshman composition class. Among the techniques discussed are Peter Elbow's four-step writing process for increasing writing fluency, the use of peer-review groups to build self-confidence and proficiency, and the use of the five-paragraph theme to help students master the standard formats and conventions of college writing. Other benefits of attending the BAWP institute referred to in the booklet are the suggestions for implementing a cross-disciplinary approach to teaching composition and the encouragement to do the assignments along with students and to share personal writing with them. (AEA)

Come On Out–The War's Over
or
Making Peace With English 1A

by

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Preface

In the following personal narrative, Roger Mueller describes how his experience in a Bay Area Writing Project Summer Institute surfaced in his own teaching. His odyssey from out of the foxhole to a five paragraph theme reminds us all of our efforts to teach writing well and to keep our own writing as part of our classrooms. What Roger gives us is not only some interesting ideas for the classroom but also new confidence in our teaching.

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In the Foxhole

Scattered throughout remote areas of the Pacific, a handful of Japanese soldiers continued to fight for years after World War II ended. Cut off from news of the peace treaty, these men carried on a lonely war to save an empire that was already lost. Only after letters from their former comrades were dropped into the jungle and reassurances were broadcast over loudspeakers did they give themselves up and become reunited with their families, their friends, and their world.

During most of my career as a composition teacher, I felt like one of these soldiers, waging a personal battle to uphold the Word passed down from Beowulf to Chaucer to Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and finally to College English Departments.

Forever on guard against error, I and my colleagues in English 1A wore out red pencils by the gross, disembowelling poorly-written themes and holding down the grading curve to demonstrate our commitment to the Highest Standards. We examined works from the canon of English literature with our students and urged them, if not to emulate Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, then at least to duplicate the feats of Orwell, Huxley, and Emerson. Armed with the heavy artillery of grammar books and hardcover composition texts, we bombarded students with rules for writing, then booby-trapped assignments with vague and ambiguous instructions that guaranteed enough errors to justify a "C" on almost any paper.

It was a lonely battle. English departments tolerated us because of our FTE, the body count that shapes administrative thinking. English 1A classes guaranteed healthy budgets and a sizeable staff for the department. They also offset low enrollments in literature courses and seminars. Like KP, freshman English was seldom the route to promotion, salary increases, or peer recognition. Like KP, freshman English was assigned to the newest, the least prepared, the lowest-ranking members of the department. Like KP, it was used at times as punishment for more senior members who were incompetent or unpleasantly outspoken. But like KP, the department tolerated freshmen English, knowing there'd always be potatoes to peel.

It was a lonely battle, not only because freshman English had so little stature within the department, but also because it had so little respect outside the department. Analysis of the imagery in Hopkins' "The Windhover" seemed somewhat irrelevant to the history professor who assigned

a paper on propaganda in Nazi Germany, or the economics professor who wanted a study of American merchandising techniques in developing countries.

It was a lonely battle because our students felt the course was irrelevant. They came to college with the expectation that English 1A would be the culmination of thirteen years of English classes. After the term started, however, they discovered that English 1A had little relevance to what they wrote in other classes and almost no relationship to anything they learned before coming to college. In the students' eyes, English 1A was a hurdle to get over, an obstacle designed to keep out the less serious student. Paper reading was an arcane rite, performed in the privacy of the professor's study, accompanied perhaps by burning incense, candles, and muttered incantations. The result was that mystery of mysteries, a grade. How it was arrived at remained a secret, known only to the high priest. Should there be comments, they were of course negative ones, since praise makes for soft writers.

I began fighting not only the ignorance of my students, but my own increasing illiteracy as well. The more I learned about writing, the less I seemed to know. The more I corrected student mistakes, the less fluent my own writing became. Like the Japanese soldier, mine was a solitary battle fought against an imagined enemy.

In 1977, news that the war was over reached me in my lonely outpost. The Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) urged me to surrender, come out of hiding, and be reunited with my colleagues in other disciplines, with my fellow writing teachers outside the university, and with the writing process itself.

What follows is the story of my emergence from the ivy-choked jungles of English 1A.

Out of the Foxhole

The 25 well-wishers who greeted me in the summer of 1977 had been assembled by BAWP from every level of teaching, kindergarten through college. For five weeks we talked about what we knew best: writing. For five weeks we taught, studied, discussed and wrote.

I went back to kindergarten that summer, and elementary school, and high school. Literally. For two days, I sat with other writing teachers in an elementary school classroom, decorated with children's art work, and filled with brightly-colored objects to look at, touch, and smell. As a member of one small group, I invented dialogue and plot for a character we added to a story, made up words for a wordless picture book, and tried to put into language my experience with "oobleck," a slippery, rubbery substance made of corn starch, water, and food coloring. I participated, bodily, in the early stages of learning how to write.

As I talked and worked with imaginative, excited teachers of students from kindergarten through college, I began to understand that English 1A is not the end product, the goal, the acme of the writing process, isolated from everything that has come before. Rather it should be a course that builds on the prior years of writing experience, a course that must be an integrated part of a learning process which continues for a lifetime.

"What do my students have to know in order to do well in English 1A?" I was frequently asked by high school teachers during the summer. The more I discovered about what students learn before they come to college, the more I realized that college teachers ought to be asking, "What are you teaching students in grades K-12 that *we* can build upon?"

Like physicians who unconsciously accept the god-like role thrust upon them by their patients, college professors tend to assume they know more about teaching than their colleagues in the elementary and secondary schools know. Perhaps, in many disciplines, the assumption is correct. As a rule, professors have more time to research and write about their discipline, more encouragement in the form of sabbaticals and promotions to keep current in the field, to publish, to engage in scholarly dialogue. Professors certify school teachers, not the other way around. School teachers receive credit and pay increases for listening to professors lecture. A professor who attends a tenth-grade English class or plays with oobleck

in a kindergarten classroom is likely to be viewed as somewhat odd—unless, of course, he's there to evaluate the teacher.

But if teachers speak only to teachers and professors speak only to God, we will always have an unnatural separation between school and college, an artificial barrier that will continually reinforce the idea that writing in college is somehow different, both substantively and conceptually. English 1A will continue to be seen as the capstone of most students' writing experiences instead of a single step along the way to writing improvement.

A New Tactic—Fluency

I took what I had learned from my colleagues in the schools back into the composition classroom. One of the things I worked on was developing fluency, the ability to produce copious quantities of material in the pre-writing stage. In my lonely war to uphold the standards of correctness, I had assumed that students who came to me were already fluent, and that what they needed most was help with editorial work.

I questioned that assumption after hearing several presentations on fluency. If fluency was still a problem in senior high school classes, why would it suddenly cease to be a problem when the students reached college? Discussing my own writing strategy with other participants, I discovered that many of us also had problems generating material in the pre-writing stage.

On the first day of class that fall, I decided to find out whether my students felt there was anything hindering their fluency. I asked for twenty minutes of free writing on the topic "writing." The responses confirmed what the summer had suggested. Most of the students feared writing. They hated to put words on paper because they feared making mistakes. Their fear began as early as the first handwriting exercises in elementary school: "Move your arm, not your wrist. Keep the pen pointed over your shoulder. Bring the loop of your 'g' down lower, the top of your 't' up higher. Slant your letters this way, not that way." Conformity was rewarded, inventiveness punished. Left-handers told dismal stories of being forced to write "the correct way." These early experiences were reinforced by later teachers who red-pencilled errors but never praised strengths, by teachers who ridiculed misdirected efforts and read poor papers aloud for the class to criticize.

To stimulate creativity and inventiveness, and increase fluency, I put students through the four-step writing process described by Peter Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers*: three sessions of writing their way into a thesis, a fourth one for the final draft and editorial work. Writing more than they could possibley use in the final draft, they began to develop confidence in the inexhaustibility of their own storehouse of sentences.

I also introduced free writing and journal writing into the class by setting aside ten minutes for free writing at the start of each two-hour class, and another 5-10 minutes for sharing the writing aloud with the

rest of the group. At first, I chose topics, generally objects, to write about, then students volunteered their own topics. I wrote too, and occasionally read what I wrote.

Reading aloud gave writers a chance to share their hopes and heartbreaks, their thoughts and intuitions with a group that wanted to hear about a favorite pair of cowboy boots, an aunt who died of cancer, the relation between noses and doorknobs, the reminiscences provoked by an air sickness bag or handful of sunflower seeds.

Journal writing assignments (three times a week, student's choice of topic and length) produced meditations on noise in the dormitories, the nature of the universe, and the fickleness of love. I made no comments on the entries, only checked to make sure the required three per week were there. Was I wrong to read and not respond? Some of my fellow BAWPers would say I was, because every writer needs an audience. But my concern was with fluency, with giving students the feeling of writing at will. I wanted writing without editorial constraints, writing in which the writer was the only audience. I wanted my students to have the experience of writing more than they would ever put into finished form. I wanted them to have the experience of writing as a frequent, natural activity.

The fluency exercises helped remove a major block – fear of correction. By the end of the semester, each student had a fat portfolio of free writing, journal entries, drafts, and papers: tangible evidence of his or her ability to produce words on demand. In the last days of the term, when time was running short, I attempted to delete the free writing exercises. And nearly started a revolution. As one student put it: "This is the first 8 o'clock class I've ever been on time for. I come because I want to participate in the free writing exercise at the beginning of the period."

A New Strategy—Proficiency

From my colleagues in the schools, I also learned the value of personal writing. They guided their students from topics they know best—themselves, their feelings, and their experiences—to those that required a measure of objectivity—book reports, research papers, formal essays. Recapitulating the process in a 1A course helped re-establish a personal voice in all writing. I now take students from personal narration to objective consideration of a formal topic, trying to encourage the personal voice in each assignment.

My first assignment asks for personal opinion: "This I know for certain." The second is a profile of a friend or relative, the third an open topic. The fourth paper, a controlled research paper, helps build the skills necessary in college writing. The final one is a paper assigned in another class.

My fellow BAWPers, then, helped me get rid of the uneasiness I felt when asking for writing not directly associated with a college assignment. They helped me see the real battle was not to erase illiteracy but to improve proficiency at all levels. I realized the importance of building fluency before moving on to form and then correctness (an apt description of the writing process I picked up from one of the participants).

I wish I could report that I'd found a successful way to help students carry over their personal voice into the controlled research theme or the paper written for another class. Unfortunately, few of them are willing to take a chance by choosing an unusual topic, adopting an imaginative viewpoint, or asserting a daring thesis. Most still play it safe in research papers and papers written for other classes, preferring rather to go by the rules they know than to take a chance with techniques that may expose them to criticism. Despite reassurances from me and other professors that it's all right to turn in an interesting paper, most of my students are still a bit gun-shy. It's a problem that all of us on campus must work to resolve. The final section of this article suggests one way in which we're trying to address that problem at the University of the Pacific by involving professors from all disciplines in helping students to write better.

Besides developing fluency and encouraging a personal voice, I try to build self-confidence through the use of peer review groups, another technique I learned that summer. In groups of five or six, students share

their papers with one another, reading aloud, then asking for responses. For the first paper, only positive responses are allowed. Soon, students get over their fear that the response group will be five people attacking their writing where only one had done it before. Each participant is vulnerable since each reads a paper to the group. Consequently, each becomes sensitive to the needs of the writer who's asking for help. Criticism is supportive, designed to help the writer improve his piece.

Responses are both objective and intuitional. The group evaluates each paper against the set of criteria for that assignment, assuring me and the student that the final draft (done after the group response) will be a better one. Subjective responses are encouraged by using some of the devices suggested by Peter Elbow, such as drawing a picture or describing the essay in metaphorical terms (a piece of clothing or a musical instrument, for example).

Peer response groups have produced papers that are easier for me to read because they've been edited by several people. Students like the setup because it provides them with a live, responsive, critical but supportive audience for their work.

Surviving in Five Paragraphs

My newly-discovered allies in BAWP also taught me some effective ways to treat form and correctness. Now, I devote a portion of the semester to what I frankly term "survival skills."

These are techniques to help students master the standard formats and conventions of college writing. One of these is the five-paragraph theme, that hoary artifact from the earliest age of composition. A presentation by Gerry Camp on a junior high school class built around the five-paragraph theme forced me to reexamine my prejudices against this mode. I decided to try it out as one of the survival skills.

If ever a technique seemed to have magical qualities, it was this one. Simple to comprehend, yet universal enough to serve as a model for a five-paragraph or 15-page theme, this device produced amazing results.

At first, students fit everything to the Procrustean bed of three main points, hacking off a major point here, stuffing in an irrelevant one there to make up the required three. As soon as we began to work out the details of each point on the blackboard, however, an important insight dawned on the students. The magic was not in the number three, but in the process of logically classifying information under the fewest possible major heads. Resurrected in the BAWP summer seminar, that old warhorse, the five-paragraph theme is doing wonders for my composition class.

I've had an early indication that the five-paragraph theme has good carry-over into other classes. Two students in a literature class this semester are graduates of the composition class. Weekly, every student in the class writes a short paper which he or she reads aloud to a response group. After hearing all the papers, one group asked both writers, "Where did you learn to write so well?" What they were responding to was not mechanical correctness (since they couldn't see the papers) but organization. Both papers had a clearly-stated thesis, easily identifiable main points with supporting evidence, and a conclusion. Here's one of the papers, exactly as written:

> Money is the driving force for everyone in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.* Vonnegut says, "A sum of money is a leading character in this tale about people, just as a sum of honey might be a leading character in a tale about bees."[1] Indeed it is our purpose,

and our center of attention. We crave money, because money is success. Money makes a person a someone, or as Mr. McAllister put it to Stewart Buntline:

> Your fortune is the most important single determinant of what you think of yourself and of what others think of you. Because of the money, you are extraordinary. Without it for example, you would not now be taking the priceless time of a senior partner in McAllister, Robjent, Reed & McGee.... If you give away your money you will become utterly ordinary.[2]

Kurt Vonnegut shows three ways to get money, each requiring it's own abilities. One, you can feed off of someone elses wealth. Two, you can get money given to you or three, you can swindle and cheat your way to wealth.

The first road to wealth, that of feeding off of someone elses money, is what Mushari did. He learned in order to be successful at it, one must be clever and sharp. A professor had once told Mushari:

> Just as a good airplane pilot should always be looking for places to land, so should a lawyer be looking for situations where large amounts of money were about to change hands.[3]

One must be able to find wealth and move skillfully in on it, in order to capitalize on it. Eliot described Mushari's plan of operation when he talked of the Money River. He said:

> We're born close enough to the river to drown ourselves and the next ten generations in wealth, simply using dippers and buckets. But we still hire experts to teach us the use of aqueducts, dams, reservoirs, siphons, bucket brigades and Archimedes' screw. And our teachers in turn become rich and their children become buyers of lessons in slurping.[4]

Indeed, Mushari was drooling.

The second way to achieve wealth is to be given money. Eliot was given all his wealth. The 58 children in Rosewater County were each given their wealth. Fred was given his $100,000. The writters at the science fiction writters convention were each given their $200 check, and Arthur Garvey Ulm got his $10,000 for 'telling the truth to the world'. For all of these, no talent at all was required, only luck. For some it was the luck of being in the right place at the right time; for others it was the luck of birth into the right family.

The final ability is that nack which Noah Rosewater so abundantly possessed. The heartlessness, the luck of conscience and

morals that allowed Noah to amass the Rose water fortune in the first place. He bribed the government to buy his more expensive weapons, "He married Cleota Herrick, the ugliest woman in Indiana, because she had four hundred thousand dollars"[5] and he was able to cut his disabled brother out of his half of of the riches without even an explaination.

So success is money, because money makes you somebody. And there are three ways to get more: Move in on someone elses; be in the right place and have it given to you; or take everyone you can, for as much of a ride as you can. It doesn't take personality, industriousness or frugality as Ben Franklin had thought. Rather Vonnegut suggests that one need only be crafty, have a little luck and no morals. Eliot realized this and refused to play by the rules, but for those of us that have to play by the rules the American Dream is just a fable.*

Survival skills include the observation of conventions. Proper usage, impeccable spelling, and correct mechanics assure a more sympathetic reading, particularly from a university audience. We spend time on these items in class, but not a lot. Instead, students get a handbook and a dictionary, and a short introduction to these tools for editing. No other texts.

I'm nervous about the mechanical errors in this theme. Since I held students responsible for near-perfect spelling in the composition class, I was disappointed to see the spelling errors. Some of the other mechanical errors, such as confusing its and it's, or failing to use the apostrophe to show possession were treated only briefly in class, and here they were, glaring up at me from the paper. I asked myself, have I placed too much emphasis on process, too little on product, spent too much time on prewriting, and not enough on editing?

The more I grappled with that question, the more it seemed like an unanswerable one. Unanswerable because there is simply not enough time in a one-semester composition class to give students all the help they need.

Given a single semester, I've concentrated on those elements that produce the most dramatic results in the shortest time. What many students need is another semester of composition, with emphasis on editing and mechanical skills.

I also keep reminding myself of what I discovered at BAWP: learning to write is a process which began in the elementary grades and will continue throughout the writer's lifetime. English 1A is only a pump station along the pipeline, not the final reservoir of knowledge and skills.

I burned my red pencils, abandoned my cache of 300-page hard-bound $11.95 composition textbooks and defused the remaining handbooks by

*Quotes from Kurt Vonnegut, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965).

establishing a clear set of criteria for each paper. If comma faults are a problem, I review that problem before the paper is due, discuss the appropriate handbook section, then put the writers on notice that the response group and I will pay particular attention to this possible problem in the paper. Other editing problems, unless specifically covered before the paper is due, are not called to the writer's attention. Each assignment is accompanied by a checklist setting out the criteria to be applied. No booby traps here.

Below are two sample checklists, one for the second paper of the term (a description of a friend or acquaintance), the other for the fourth paper (controlled research).

Checklist for Paper No. 2

I. Survival Techniques

Introduction

Does the introduction arouse interest, curiosity?
Does the introduction state the purpose of the paper (thesis)?

Body

Are descriptions vivid? Does the person being described come alive on the page?
Is the paper assertive? Does it center on a theme or thesis?
Some suggestions for assertiveness:
Be mind-probing (challenging)
Be thought-provoking
Inspire action
Say something the reader will disagree with
Stimulate a new perspective

Editing Concerns

Title
Bond paper, not onion skin or floppy erasable paper
Ink, not pencil, if written in longhand
Spelling

II. Growing

Reread Elbow, Chapter 2.
Did you try free writing to generate ideas?
Did you go through the stages suggested on pp. 18-22, and practiced in class?
Did you keep the editor from looking over your shoulder during the early stages of writing?
Did you welcome disorientation and chaos in the early stages, as a part of the creative process?
Did you write lots in the first stages so that you could pick out the gems and throw away the garbage in the last stage?

Checklist for Paper No. 4

All points listed for papers No. 2 & 3 (where appropriate) plus:

Thesis

Thesis (conclusion) stated in introduction

Premises

Premises which lead to conclusion clearly revealed by organization of paper

Premises which make effective use of one or more of the following:

- Statements of fact
- Judgments
- Expert testimony

Inferences

Inferences may be drawn by:

- Generalization
- Causal relation
- Causal generalization
- Analogy

Fallacies

Avoid these fallacies:

- Ignoring the burden of proof
- Begging the question
- Argumentum ad hominem
- Extension
- Red Herring
- Unjustifiable emotional appeal
- Hasty generalization
- Stereotype
- Either-or fallacy
- Oversimplified cause
- Unexamined analogies

Editing Concerns

Sources footnoted

Footnotes and bibliography follow conventional form

Allies In Other Departments

I had expected English teachers among the welcoming band. But what was that math teacher doing here? Or that history teacher? And what was all this about writing across the curriculum? Composition belonged to English, not mathematics or history.

But as those outsiders began to talk of writing as a learning process, I realized that English 1A teachers have allies they've never called upon. The designation of composition as an English course rather than an all-university or integrative course has helped build a wall between composition and other departments. The notion that helping students with their writing is primarily a matter of identifying editorial faults with the correct grammatical nomenclature has warned off other departments as well. Academics, like other animals, mark out their territory. Our messages are not left on trees, but in the books and articles we fill with the terminology of our disciplines. "I can't tell a participle from a gerund," is the anthropologist's justification for not helping students with their writing.

But after my experience with BAWP, I recognized the obvious: that writing is a part of the learning process in all disciplines, and I came to the conclusion that the teaching of writing is too important to be left in the hands of any one department.

I went back to my teaching, resolved to share what I had discovered about writing with my colleagues across the campus, and curious about trying my teaching techniques in another discipline.

I started by using samples from the writing of my colleagues in class, so students could see "real" writing done by "real" people they knew on campus. The food service director had an M.A. in comparative literature and a handful of publications in professional journals. I used some of these to illustrate introductions. Another colleague had written for a children's magazine, a general-interest scientific magazine, and a professional journal. I used samples from these three publications to illustrate the importance of identifying audiences.

With the support of the university's professional development office, another professor and I have organized a series of two and three-day seminars for professors from all disciplines. The subject: helping students to write better. Modeled after a similar program at Grinnell College, the seminars examine the role of writing across the campus.

We examine the need for long papers ("I never stopped to think about it till now. The only reason I assign a term paper is because everyone else in the department assigns one," an astonished professor remarked). We explore other possible writing assignments – journals, letters, non-graded "practice" mid-terms, 5-15 minute anonymous essays to gauge the extent of students' comprehension.

I discuss the role of the thesis and examples in writing. My colleague reviews the rhetorical structure of the essay.

We discovered that one reason editing concerns such as spelling, punctuation, and footnote form were uppermost in most professors' minds was that they lacked the tools to properly analyze and discuss rhetorical structure. Yet the lack of a coherent structure proved to be the most serious and most easily-corrected problem in student papers.

Each of the twelve participants contributes one essay on the role of writing in his or her classes. Each professor makes up a checklist of criteria for written work, a checklist that can be distributed when an assignment is made.

Here are two examples, one from the modern language department, the other from economics. Each professor has individualized his checklist to cover the points he or she considers most important. The second one goes a step further and weighs each item. In both cases, students know exactly what is expected before they begin to write.

Personal Checklist for Evaluating Writing

1. CONTENT
   a. Does it meet thematic requirements of assignment, including role of writer and intended audience?
   b. Topic narrow and defined?
   c. Title clearly developed and appropriate to thesis?
   d. Does introduction do one or more of following: state thesis, raise questions, arouse interest, show creativity?
   e. Does the body
      1) give specific evidence (examples/quotes) to support thesis?
      2) speak to thesis, not ramble?
   f. Does conclusion provoke thought, resolve problem, state or restate thesis, end powerfully?

2. ORGANIZATION
   a. Does it meet formal requirements of assignment: e.g. typewritten, referential system, vocabulary, etc?
   b. Clearly ordered presentation?
   c. Paragraphs unified and developed?
   d. Transitions smooth and effective?
   e. Sentences complete and developed?

3. LANGUAGE

a. Mechanics
   1) verb forms?
   2) word order?
   3) spelling and punctuation?
   4) idiomatic usage?

b. Diction
   1) appropriate to audience?
   2) accurate?
   3) idiomatic?

Personal Evaluation Checklist

Economics Writing Assignment

Title of Paper: _____ Course Title: _____

Author: _____ Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

	SCORES	
1. Introduction:	_____	(1,2)
2. Interest to Reader:	_____	(1,2)
3. Thesis Statement:	_____	(1,2,3,4)
4. Paragraph:	_____	(1,2,3,4)
5. Sentences:	_____	(1,2,3,4)
6. Analysis:	_____	(1,2,3,4,5,6)
7. Substantiation:	_____	(1,2,3,4,5,6)
8. Confirmation:	_____	(1,2,3,4,5,6)
9. Concluding Section:	_____	(1,2,3,4)
10. Documentation:	_____	(1,2,3,4)
11. Grammar and Usage:	_____	(1,2,3,4)

What was good about the paper? What would improve the paper?

How effective have the writing seminars been? Our only means of measurement so far has been the continuing interest of professors from all parts of the campus. We've held three so far and have been asked to do more next year. We'll continue as long as faculty members keep signing up for them. Right now, we don't see any end in sight.

In the post-BAWP era, I team-taught a course, "Thinking and Writing About Nature" with a biology professor, Steve Anderson. The goal of the course was to improve student writing by focusing on the process, rather than the product.

Steve, a fluent writer himself, wanted to explore some other ways of using student writing besides the lengthy formal paper he usually required, and which students generally found difficult.

In order to encourage students to take risks, we offered the course on a pass-fail basis. Students passed if they came to class and did the assignments.

Most of the techniques we used in this class were replications or modifications of ideas I picked up at the BAWP institute.

Journals, with entries required three times a week, were designed to get students out into the field (in this case, the Calaveras River, which runs through the campus), making observations from which they could draw material for future writing assignments.

A modeling exercise helped students distinguish between technical, objective writing and suggestive, subjective prose. Students read a journal article describing a new species of lizard, then modeled descriptions of their own thumbnails after the article. They did the same with an article on frogs from a children's magazine.

A blind walk with a sighted person leading a blindfolded partner around an area of the campus served to heighten sensory perceptions. This very effective technique came from an elementary school teacher's presentation at BAWP.

A group writing project at the end of the term gave students a chance to observe, report, compose, and edit with continual feedback from other participants. Peer review throughout the semester assured writers of a first-draft audience before Steve and I saw the material.

Because of the difficulty of assigning the course to a department ("Is it English or biology? The computer needs to know."), we may not repeat it. But the spin-offs will influence our teaching for a long time. Steve returned to his biology classroom with a number of alternatives to the long paper. I went back to my composition class with a renewed appreciation of the cross-disciplinary effectiveness of the techniques I learned at BAWP.

Out of the Emotional Jungle

BAWP beckoned me out of my isolation and put me in touch with teachers outside the university. BAWP also helped shape my ideas about writing as a cross-disciplinary process and in so doing brought me into contact with professors from other departments. These contacts inside and outside the university have, as I indicated, shaped my conception that English 1A is part of a larger endeavor: the effort at all levels and in many disciplines to help students write better.

But BAWP beckoned me out of another jungle as well, the jungle of tangled emotions that seized me whenever I sat down to write.

I stopped enjoying writing shortly after I started graduate school. A heavy emphasis on editorial correctness, objectivity, citation of sources, and muffling of the personal voice led me further and further into the morass of pseudo-academic writing, the sort of writing that demands a footnote to identify the source of every conceivable statement with any substance whatsoever. Here's a representative example from my first published article:

Transcendental Periodicals and the Orient

> Ever since the appearance of Frederic Ives Carpenter's *Emerson and Asia*[1] and Arthur E. Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*,[2] students of the period have been aware of the early Transcendentalists' fascination with the Orient: Emerson's eclectic theology, Thoreau's immersion in nature, and Alcott's interest in universal scriptures all were strengthened and confirmed by their Oriental reading.[3] Numerous articles have appeared on the relationship of Emerson and Thoreau to the Orient, but very little is known about the later Transcendentalists and their attitudes toward the Orient. Christy was aware of the limitations of his book when he said in the Preface: "It should be clearly understood that the limiting of this study to the Concord men is arbitrary. There were other members of the Transcendental communion, Theodore Parker, Convers Francis, James Freeman Clarke, and Samuel Johnson, to mention a few, who were interested in the Orient. They also should logically be included in any study which bears the title of this book."[4]

Four footnotes in the first paragraph, three in the first sentence! More than a third of the paragraph devoted to direct quote. This was the kind of defensive writing that helped me win the battle for a Ph.D. It was not until years later that I realized how much the victory had cost me in terms of my own writing skills and pleasures.

BAWP did not remake me into a professional writer, but it did begin to put me back in touch with my personal voice. Writing papers and sharing them with a response group of six other participants, I experienced a thrill of creativity that had been absent from my writing for years.

Like many composition teachers, the more I had corrected student papers and the more I had acted as editor of their drafts, the more critical I became of my own writing. Self-criticism started the minute I put my first words on paper and dogged me until I gave up in despair or fought a war of attrition against my rebellious psyche. Writing was painful and unsatisfying because I edited as soon as the words got down on paper, because I shared my writing with no one before sending it off for possible publication (I couldn't take the criticism, I thought), and because I was sure I would never again write with the pleasure I had experienced in high school and college.

The peer response groups at BAWP changed that. Like everyone else in the group, I introduced my writing with excuses, hoping to defuse the criticism before it exploded: "I had company last night." "This isn't really finished." "I don't think you want to hear this."

"Quit stalling and read," came the response. And read I did, in a quavering voice at first, then with more assurance, finally even with conviction. The criticism came. The compliments, too. The criticism, to my amazement, was helpful. Here were people who wanted to help me improve what I had written, people who could see what I could not—the parts that needed improvement and the parts that worked. The first reading was an emotional experience that washed away years of fear and frustration and reunited me with the writing process once more.

It's an experience I've carried back to the classroom with me. Now I write assignments (some, not all) along with my students, and share them with a response group, as I did with theme #4, a persuasion paper. I paired students with opposing views on a topic, then asked them to persuade each other to change sides. My partner was a second semester freshman who wanted to drop out of school. I didn't think she should. Here's my introduction:

The Choice is Yours

> Picture this. You're thirty years old, married, with two children under twelve years old, worried about the price of food, how to pay for Johnny's braces, where to find the money for Janie's skiing lessons. Your husband suggests that you get a part-time job to help out with finances. You've looked around, but the only

jobs available pay so little you could barely earn enough to cover your increased expenses for transportation, clothes, and meals. The better-paying jobs, you soon learn, require a college degree. And you only have a high school degree, because you chose not to go on to college immediately after high school. What do you do now?

Or imagine yourself in this situation. Twenty-five years old, unmarried, living in a comfortable apartment in San Francisco. You decided to wait a year between high school and the beginning of college, took a job as a secretary with a firm in San Francisco's financial district, got hooked on living the life of a swinging single, the parties, the clothes, the cars, the guys. Soon one year became two, then three, and now, seven years after high school, you're still vowing to go back to college some day. But now you're a little worried about giving up the good times of an employed bachelor girl, a little worried about going to school with kids seven years younger than yourself, more than a little worried about how you'll find the time or the money to complete four years of college.

Doing the assignments and sharing my writing with students has increased my self-confidence in an unexpected way. Only occasionally do I turn out the "best" piece in the room. Students are reassured to see that I too make errors and have lapses of imagination. I am relieved that I no longer have to fear an imaginary enemy, criticism. As I become more comfortable with the idea of other people, students and faculty, helping me with my writing, my own fluency is increasing. Some of the early joy of writing has started to reappear.

Now that I'm back in touch with my fellow teachers outside the university, with my colleagues inside the university, and with the writing process itself, I look back on my years of isolation and try to see the humor in that lonely battle to uphold the Word and swell the FTE.

I hope that any of my colleagues still in the jungle will find this note and give themselves up. Because it's really all right to come on out now. The war's over.