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ABSTRACT

This paper presents 10 techniques for tutoring college-level writing students on word processors. Good teaching and tutoring techniques enable writers rather than simply demand compliance. A good technique: must not rely on a fancy word processing program; will take advantage of the basic word processing functions; will ask that the writer do something with the text; will be portable; and will maintain student control. The 10 techniques are: (1) help the writer locate his or her concerns by putting them in the screen; (2) help the writer create openings for more writing and visualize the organization by using carriage returns to isolate parts of text; (3) encourage paragraph development by asking the writer to write a screen of text from a single sentence; (4) assist writing for coherence by copying and pasting the thesis statement in front of every paragraph; (5) use copy and paste to create a thumbnail outline from the writing; (6) help the writer make rhetorical choices by creating variations of original versions of parts of the text; (7) teach punctuation patterns using the computer's search functions; (8) help the writer compose a search strategy; (9) to check unity and organization, use the search and replace function to find and mark key words in the text; and (10) to teach drafting and discovery, exchange keyboards. (Contains 19 references.) (RS)

Hands Off: Ten Techniques for Tutoring on Word Processors

Paper originally presented at
The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English Convention
April 1989

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These techniques were adapted from a variety of sources and are being developed at the Bemidji State University Writing Center and in basic writing courses taught in the Writing Center.

BSU's Writing Center houses thirty Macintosh computers reserved for writing. Our tutors‹drawn from juniors and seniors from all disciplines‹primarily tutor students using traditional printouts: hard copy. But the number of computers and the popularity of their use‹and a general interest in computer assisted teaching and computer assisted instruction‹suggests that the more we can tutor right on the word processor, the more we can do to help students write.

Origin of this compilation: Some name dropping and some ideas

At the Macintosh in Composition Conference at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, November 1988, I was part of a discussion group headed by Cynthia Selfe, CAI developer, co-editor with Gail Hawisher of *Computers in Composition*, and teacher of English at Michigan Technological University.

Our group dealt with questions of the student sovereignty of the text: that is, the right of the student to make choices about her writing as she writes it. This is a particularly interesting question when applied to writing with word processors. The text, it is argued, is so in flux, so volatile, so much like a still-wet canvas or an emerging drawing, that teachers or tutors or readers can heavily influence its shaping by the writer-at-work with a comment, a remark, the point of a finger.

I know this from experience. I have tried to spark a revision by looking over the shoulder of a student and saying "Oh, yeah? Who's gonna believe that?" The writer inevitably deletes the passage and takes another stab at it‹only occasionally the reaction that would serve the writer well.

The correct alignment on this issue, one faction argued, is that the teacher is to help the writer shape the writing to realize her own intent rather than going into the paper. How, they argue, can we, even as teachers‹especially as teachers‹know or even guess what the student really wants to say from the imperfect, yet-forming writing that we're looking at on the screen or in a draft? And who are we, they argue, to presume that we know the student's intent better than the student?

argue, to presume that we know the student's intent better than the student?

The imperative is, "Keep your hands off my keyboard!"

The question of student possession of the writing and the teacher's relation to that possession remains problematic‹when it comes to teachers. But with peer writing tutors, the lines are drawn: The writing is the student's and it is our job‹mine too, when I work as a tutor‹to come to an understanding of what the writer wants to do instead of imposing our meaning on the writing by imposing our choices on it.

Back at BSUŠ

ŠI was considering how we might approach tutoring writing on the word processor: tutoring writing in progress.

My first directions to the tutors, back in the hazy days of 1986 when we had five computers, was to leave the writers alone. The tutors had enough to do. As well, because you can read only twenty-six lines of text, all you can do on the spot is deal with local, sentence-level problems, which were, by the way, the main concern of most of the writers. They asked questions that addressed local issues such as "Does that sentence sound ok?" and "Do I need a comma here?" and "Do I capitalize 'high school' here?"

Tutors could answer these questions, of course, but to what end? The writers would look to tutors as walking grammar books, becoming dependent on them rather than, as we would wish, independent of them. Our response to the questions of the student writers was to put them on to the appropriate source, and if they had a repeated concern about the paper, to run a copy and tutor and writer could have a look at itŠ.
This approach, too, goes back questions of who owns the text: some writers are ver
y willing to simply turn it over to another person to "fix," in spite of the distortion of the meaning that can result from this. One point that still needs to be addressed in teaching and tutoring is not the right of ownership, but the responsibility of ownership.

Redefining the role of the peer tutor

After the Mac conference, I re-evaluated how we were approaching on-line tutoring.

Being able to read only twenty-six lines of text may be a virtue rather than a hindrance, at least from the point of view of a tutor or teacher. Because the writer was in front of the keyboard controlling the machine, she couldn't turn the writing over to the tutor to "Read it over and tell me what's wrong." That small window of twenty six lines meant that the writer had to point to what she was concerned with, had to select and specify what the tutor might look at; and it meant that she couldn't readily escape looking at it herself.
On the other hand, it also meant that the tutor had to ask the right questions of the writer‹which, to me, was a pleasant way of teaching my tutors how to work with writers with more sophistication and deftness.

That is, the very restrictions of the word processor provided the opportunity to expose tutors to the kind of effective tutoring that I like to help them develop‹a hands-off approach.

Reapproaching the techniques

I began to dig through the texts on word processing again, watching for techniques that were particularly workable in tutoring on the softcopy text. While doing this search, I came up with a first principle and

workable in tutoring on the softcopy text. While doing this search, I came up with a first principle and five criteria that I wanted to meet with the techniques I proposed:

A first principle:

A good teaching and tutoring technique will enable a writer rather than simply demand compliance. It will put the writer in a position to discover something on her own. This principle appears in this list as shaping techniques to allow the writer to do something.

Five Criteria

1. A technique must not rely on fancy word processing programs or text analysis programs. This is more a practical matter than one of any great pedagogical soundness; I am interested in devising common, reusable techniques rather than pushing for the virtues of any particular program. But, at the same time, this criterion invokes the idea that a good technique is one that's available immediately, and at all times: it is right there, handy, within reach, and one needn't spend time qutting one application and starting another, nor be hampered by not having a specialized program at hand.

2. A good technique will take advantage of the basic word processing functions and capabilities, and take advantage of the nature and limits of the machine and the user. By functions and capabilities of the machine I mean such things as being able to insert text anywhere in the document, to create openings such as white space or blank lines, to cut text from one area and paste it in another, to search for text and replace it, to scroll through text so to show only part of it on the screen, to alter the view or formatting of the text and to print it out in that view, and the ability to readily create multiple copies of all or part of a document so to create variations on the text. By the limits and nature of the machine I mean the limited view of text that the screen size determines, the playfulness and interest in using the machine, the ability to deal with high-order concerns before editing concerns while maintaining the integrity of the text, and the ability to use of the writer's own text rather than worksheets or examples that are not her own.

3. A good technique will ask that the writer do something with the text. The beauty of word processors is that it lets us manipulate text easily. That ease has led to notions of softcopy and the fluid text to describe the tentativeness of the text that the writer creates: not something writ in stone but on a wax tablet (Balestri, Catano). A good tutoring technique, then, will play off the notion of the soft text as a means of dramatizing how to deal with a difficulty: while experienced writers might be able to imagine what a change in the text will look like, how it will change the meaning and sense, and be able to make the comparison between the original and the potential revision in their heads, inexperienced writers learn by manipulating the text on the page to create a new version that they can then compare to the original.

Consequently, techniques that are particularly effective demand that the writer in some way manipulate or restructure existing text: to add returns between sentence to create blank space, to copy and paste parts of paragraphs or sentences from the text into a new form, to make a list, and so on. These are tasks that require that the writer identify something‹a sentence, a phrase, the turn of an argument, a word‹in order to manipulate the text.

4. A good technique will be portable‹usable by students to write with beyond the tutoring. Particularly good techniques will be writing strategies and not simply nonce techniques. Compare the idea of asking a student to fill out a drill-for-skill worksheet vs. correcting a selection of her own sentences. When I'm writing, I never stop do the first, but I often need to do the second‹which is a partial

explanation of why drill-for-skill is of doubtful value. In a similar fashion, if I ask a student to create four variations of one of her sentences, then to choose the one that works best in the context and ask her to explain why she chose what she did, I have not only helped her address an immediate concern (sentence structure problems) but given her a strategy that she can apply whenever she writes.

5. A good technique will maintain student control of the text‹both keeping the tutor's hands off the text and the writer's hand on it. That is, the technique should keep the student in control of the machine, and so in control of the text. This is not just to prevent getting too many hands in the way or to encourage independence. Instead, a good technique will play off the distance that the tutor must maintain from the text, using it to remind us that the writing is the student's.

At the same time, this distance will demand that we ask the appropriate kinds of questions of the writer: essentially those questions that ask the writer to point to something, to show us something, to create something, to find something that the writer wants to look at. And this in turn means that the student maintains sovereignty over her text and the situation, which, I would have to argue, makes the whole matter meaningful to the student, and keeps the tutor in the subordinate position, in the role of assistant, coach, helper. The tutor, that is, in staying clear of the text and out of the writer's light, must also put the student in a position to find out, for herself, what the problem is and somehow put it across to the tutor‹either by explaining it or by demonstrating it for the tutor. And this shifts the responsibility from the tutor to the writer and her text.

Let's say that the writer has been asked to locate a sentence or phrase in each paragraph that seems to articulate the main idea of that paragraph, then to collect those phrases by copying and pasting them into a list. To perform this task means that the student must be able to spot a topic sentence; and yet, ironically, if the student can spot a topic sentence, she does not need to go through this rigmarole; she doesn't really stand much to gain by doing what she's doing.

Except that finding topic sentences is not the point of the exercise‹not in tutoring, at any rate. In being asked to find, copy, and collect what the writer understands to be the main idea in the paragraph, the tutor (or teacher) gets a handle on what the writer wants to work with, on what the writer intends as her main idea. By isolating this articulation of the idea and collecting it together with the other ideas, the writer can begin to see a pattern in the ideas and reshape the whole. From there, the tutor can‹if necessary‹introduce the notion of putting topic sentences in certain positions in the text, a task made all the easier by the word processor itself.

All of which is to say that by keeping the student's hands on the text and our own off of it keeps us all intellectually honest.

The Techniques

Creating a working space

Some of these techniques involve using and reusing the text, moving things around, creating variations: in short, creating revisions. To be effective, and to forestall the writer's legitimate concern of ruining her hard-worked sentences, it is wise to create a new working space to play around in. This might start by creating a new file by saving the document under a different name and working on the new version. The writer is then free to tinker with the text, confident that there is an unaltered version on the disk that she can go back to.

Some techniques involve creating space between sentences or paragraphs and then writing variations of

Some techniques involve creating space between sentences or paragraphs and then writing variations of the text. The new text can be distinguished from the original by using a different type style, or writing in all capital letters, or by placing a line of asterisks or other markers between the original version and the variation, depending on the capabilities of your word processing software. In other cases, tutors have writers copy and paste material at the end of the document, setting off the new material with a number of carriage returns and a row of asterisks, a sort of scrap section to work in.

At any rate, the idea is to set some space aside for tinkering, the kind of tinkering that might normally go on on a second sheet of paper.

1. Help the writer locate her concerns by putting them on the screen for you.

Anchor the writer's difficulties and problems in the text she's working on. The screen acts as a frame: the writer can more readily focus on a section of the text that she is concerned with and remove distractions of the text as a whole.

A tutor will ask, typically, "Show me a place where the writing works, where you're not having problems, where it came easily Š" and so on, encouraging the writer to find a strength to work from, a passage to work from.

Then, after the writer explains why that section is comfortable, the tutor moves on to "Scroll to a place in the text where you're having problems," and the student define the kind of difficulty the she is having in that passage.

To focus more closely, the tutor can ask the writer to double-space the text, or to place carriage returns between the sentences, or to single-space to place more material on the screen: that is, to make adjustments or manipulations of the text in order to further isolate the difficulty in a sentence or short passage, according to the kind of problem that emerges as both view the text.

Comments
The basis for this technique is the kinds of questions that Donald Murray uses to "teach the writer, not the writing" (Murray, "The Listening Eye"). They are designed to elicit a writer's response to her own text and so allow the tutor to address less the text and more the response itself. I encourage tutors to avoid proceeding until they have helped the student isolate a concern in the writing itself‹a sentence, a word, a paragraph‹in order to let the writer, at least at first, set the direction and concern of the session.

By asking the writer to scroll through the text to present sections, tutors teach writers that they can look to their own writing for answers. This technique, then, is a way of finding a starting point, a way of diagnosing the problems the writer is concerned with and of determining what to do next.
Often, students who come in for tutoring want to turn the printed or written text ove
r to the tutor with "Read this over and tell me what you think." It is easy to shove a paper over to a tutor, but we find that it's difficult‹and unnecessary‹for the writer to turn the machine over to the tutor: difficult because it means changing places, and unnecessary because both tutor and writer can easily share a view of the text.

2. Help the writer create openings for more writing and visualize the organization by using carriage returns to isolate parts of the text.

Place carriage returns‹white space‹between units you wish to isolate and work with: sections, paragraphs, sentences.
Doing so alters the character of the text. It no longer appears seamless; it is no longer one long string of

Doing so alters the character of the text. It no longer appears seamless; it is no longer one long string of sentences and paragraphs without openings, but chunks or blocks of text, each with openings for more material on each end.

Comment
It might seem that the linear nature of a word processor, with its metaphoric long roll of typing paper, restricts the writer to a linear, rather than recursive, manner of development while drafting. That is, the writer starts, the paper keeps rolling by, and the writer journeys along the path as she goes‹but ever forward, looking back only to see how far she has come rather than to make changes. The word processor seems to remove the recursive possibilities of marginal notations and later additions that are encouraged in pencil and paper writing (Balestri, "Softcopy").

However, that linearity can be broken. The machine allows writers to break the text at any point in order to isolate or insert material. In fact, Balestri points out, while in the handwritten or typed text, the main entry point, the place at which more text is added, is at the end, in softcopy, any point can become an opening for adding material (Balestri).

Variations

- ☐ Isolate paragraphs with carriage returns to consider the development of paragraphs.

Ask the student to place two or three carriage returns at the end of each paragraph, then scroll through the text or print it out, looking first for long and short paragraphs, and second, while explaining what development means in this case, for opportunities to add to paragraphs, or to add material between paragraphs.

Have the student find a longish paragraph, one that is at least partially developed. Then consider how it is developed and work out a strategy for developing other paragraphs (adding details or examples, devising rephrasings). Then, moving to a problematic paragraph, have the writer begin to add material‹perhaps, at first, in the form of a list of notes at the end of the paragraph, notes that, later, the writer will develop into sentences, or by using the technique for encouraging development I will come to in a moment.

Comments
Breaking the text open returns the student to a kind of local prewriting, working off of the paragraph to develop more material from it, prompting re-coursing through the emerging writing.

- ☐ Locate undeveloped and single-sentence paragraphs by placing a carriage returns where ever the ideas seems to shift.

In working with passages of text that look like paragraphs but are really a mere collection of more or less related sentences, the tutor asks the writer to hit two carriage returns whenever she‹the writer‹thinks she begins a new idea‹even if that idea is only a sentence long. The wording is intentionally vague‹idea‹and intentionally places the freedom on the writer: wherever she seems to start.

Letting the writer do this, of course, gives the tutor a sense of how the writer views her text, how the writer groups her sentences for herself, an understanding that may be in her head as intent but not yet on paper.

These clusters of sentences may be thought of as proto-paragraphs: paragraphs just forming. Once the groups of sentences are isolated, the tutor defines them as the beginnings or ends of paragraphs, enabling the writer to re-see her writing, and works with the writer to develop paragraphs for them.

the writer to re-see her writing, and works with the writer to develop paragraphs for them.

- ☐ Deal with sentence problems by isolating sentences with carriage returns.

Obviously, the same technique of isolating chunks of text works at sentence level: here, the student places extra returns wherever she sees a new sentence.

When sentences are isolated, tutor and writer can look at

- ☐ stylistic concerns such as sentence length and variation
- ☐ syntactical concerns such as fragments (often signaled by a short chunk) and fused sentences and comma splices (signaled by being visually a large chunk)
- ☐ connectors and transitions from one sentence to the next that lend to paragraph coherence.

Comments
I regularly use this technique of breaking the text into sentences in basic writing courses, with a spontaneous side-effect. When students have finished a second draft of a paper, I ask that they break the text into this list of double-spaced sentences, print out a copy, and begin work on editing: watching for and correcting fragments, run-ons, contorted and problematic sentences, variations of length‹each according to his or her particular difficulty. But as they are looking for fragments and run-ons, they begin to write in sentences between the printed, already-written ones: sentences that clarify, explain, exemplify, restate the local sentences. In a word, the students tend to develop the paragraphs as they edit sentences: tinkering with sentence-level concerns tend to lead to high order revision.

In the fragmented text, no longer does one sentence lead inevitably to the next as surely as line leads to line. Students see gaps in the writing as they see gaps between the sentences and will generate other possibilities, other sentences that can be written. Each isolated sentence, that is, provides an opening before and after for more text, which students can now add with a larger sense of the whole paper rather than, as at first, with an only emerging sense of direction.

- ☐ Prompt reworking sentence structures by using a carriage return to break open sentences according to their parts.

The trick of isolating parts of the text by carriage returns can be used within sentences, as well, to address awkward and wordy sentences, and to study sentence structures such as parallelism.

Lanham shows how to crack open contorted sentences by hitting a return at each be-verb and each prepositional phrase. The result is a long list of phrases from which the monster-sentence is built, and from which the writer can begin to create more readable versions (Lanham, Revising Prose).

The same technique of isolating sentence units on their own lines is useful for demonstrating and encouraging sentence structures such as parallel construction, or for illustrating the use of commas with coordinating conjunctions, using semi-colons, and so on. Breaking down the sentence in this way allows us to show visual patterns that are often lost in the line-like structure of the standard text. And finally, Christensen's cumulative sentence work is wonderfully easy to demonstrate right in a student's paper ("Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence").

3. Encourage paragraph development by asking the writer to write a screen of text from a single sentence.

Here is a way of letting the student visualize the development of a paragraph: Highlight the first and last sentences of each paragraph by changing the type style to bold. Thin paragraphs will be thin sandwiches.

Tutors have writers isolate a sentence from a paragraph that needs development by placing carriage returns fore and aft. Then the writer scrolls to place the first sentence at the top of the screen. The writer is asked to write her way to the bottom of the screen, staying on the subject introduced in their sentence. This is, really, a variation of a focused freewriting, and the tutor will instruct the writer on freewriting and set a reasonable time limit.

But a more effective way of handling paragraph development is this variation of a word processing exercise called "screen scenes": the occasion of the two-sentence paragraphs that are common with freshmen writers serves as a starting point.

The writer places the cursor between the first and the last sentence and, with the instructions to write her way from the first sentence to the last one, generates a screen of prose.

Comments
This approach of the expanding text does on screen what my basic writers tend to do when they work with their sentence-list drafts.

Why does this work? First, the paragraph is isolated from its surroundings; the writer can concentrate, momentarily, on a smaller unit within the developing larger idea of the paper as a whole. Second, the first and last sentences provide markers, touchstones, reminders to the writer of where she is starting and where she wants to end up. In any case, she knows when she is "done" with the exercise, if not the paragraph: when the screen is full. Consequently, it is important that the writer generates her own start and end points or that the tutor helps her select them from the text itself.

That is one of the beauties of teaching with a word processor: that the student can use her own writing to explore her own writing.

4. Assist writing for coherence by copying and pasting the thesis statement in front of every paragraph

If the writer tends to wander from the thesis, the tutor will help the student locate‹or create‹a thesis statement, copy it, and paste it at the beginning of each isolated paragraph so that the thesis is on the screen with each paragraph: a visual reminder to connect paragraphs back to the thesis.

Comments
One of the features of word processed text is its tendency to wander, or unconsciously circle back on itself, with writers restating the same ideas at different places in the text (sources). Students may write more, but because the text appears in a window of twenty six lines or so, the writer tends to forget where she's been and reiterates. This is wonderful for writing first drafts, as long as in a later draft the reiterations are brought to bear on one another. But for some writers writing for teachers who demand linearly developed texts, it can pose a problem. A solution, then, seems to be coming up with a way to keep the point of the business at hand‹a thesis statement‹in front of the writer.

Obviously, this exercise is an opportunity for creating or refining a thesis; the need has arisen for one, especially if the writer senses that the isolated chunks of text do not seem to hold together. So, too, the tutor can articulate the need for the thesis in new terms‹terms of function rather than feature: "We're looking for a sentence that sort of applies to all these paragraphs, a common title for all of them that you

looking for a sentence that sort of applies to all these paragraphs, a common title for all of them that you can put at the beginning of each one to help you get organizedŠ"

Occasionally, of course, a thesis statement already appears in the text‹but not in the conventional place. The tutor can ask the writer to read the text to select a sentence that would serve as a general title for all the paragraphs and work from there, copying it and pasting it in front of each paragraph. Later, of course, the spurious thesis statements can be cut from the final version.

Further uses for cut, copy, and paste involve creating variations of organization at any level of concern: redrafting sentences, reordering sentences within paragraphs, reordering paragraphs, moving material from one paragraph to another.

5. To get an overall view of the text, use copy and paste to create a thumbnail outline from the writing.
Ask the student to find and copy a main sentence‹a topic sentence‹in each paragraph and paste them to the end of the file in a list.

Alternately, have the writer copy and paste into a list whatever **she** considers to be the main idea or ideas she finds in each paragraph.

From this sentence or phrase list‹a kind of outline‹tutor and writer discuss any number of concerns: possible changes in order of paragraphs, splitting paragraphs to develop them, coordination and subordination, thesis statements, and so on.

Comments
Writer and tutor can study the coherence and general shape of the paper as a whole by copying and pasting the main sentence of each paragraph, or the key phrase in that sentence, into a list at the end of the text. If she finds more than one main idea in the paragraph, she copies what she finds. Again, letting the student decide what will be main gives the tutor a sense of what the writer sees as main, gives the tutor a sense of how the student is reading her own work.

If more than one main idea is showing up in a single paragraph, this opens the possibility of creating two paragraphs or synthesizing a topic sentences that brings the two main ideas together.

By comparing the items on the list with their location in the paragraphs from which they were drawn, the writer and tutor can move into organizing sentences within paragraphs, the convention of topic sentences, or the use of implied topic sentences.

6. Help the writer make rhetorical choices by creating variations of original versions of parts of the text and comparing them.
Have the student duplicate the entire section you wish to work with‹paragraph or sentence or paper‹and paste the copy just below the original so that original and copy will be visible at the same time.

Use the copy for creating variations. Compare the differences.

Comments
The tutor and writer are creating the material for a tutoring session away from the machine here (although, of course, this could be handled on the machine.) In one sense, they are creating their own worksheet or handout or textbook chapter.

Comparison makes for wise choices. But the volitile nature of the computer text means that changes

Comparison makes for wise choices. But the volitile nature of the computer text means that changes disappear as the revised version replaces the original, and the writer gives up the opportunity to directly compare the two versions. Hence the recommendation from a number of sources (sources) to write and consider the revision before discarding the original.

In any case, focus the comparison on the changing meaning and rhetorical effect of the variation, as well as the organizational principle that the student uses to construct the paragraph: from general to specific, for instance, or from specifics to generalization.

Variations

- Copy a problematic sentence and create variations on it by rearranging it, starting with various subjects, and so on.
- To deal with awkward and wordy sentences, you may have the student find the verb and subject ("What is the action here? Who is doing it?"), and then create a variation of the sentence that starts with that subject and verb. "Ok, start this version with the actor and the action and write the sentence from there."
- Copy a paragraph and create variations of sentence order.
- For paragraphs that are pretty much all there, suggest simply reversing the order of sentences: often the paragraph will be more effective.
- Or suggest that the writer choose a sentence from the paragraph, one she considers main, to start the paragraph and then reorganize the remaining sentences, adding, of course, any transitional words she feels necessary.

7. Teach punctuation patterns using the computer's search function.
Search and replace functions on the word processor can be used to isolate a number of problems, from finding and checking commas and periods, to finding common misspellings. The machine can't make corrections, obviously, but it can help the writer locate the difficulties. But searching will only find something that exists. Consequently, searching for commas will enable a writer to make sure she has used her commas correctly, but will not ensure that she has not missed places where commas ought to be used.

One way around this difficulty is, then, is to search for strings of words, or features of words, that mark places where commas, for instance, might be used. A comma is used, that is, to set off an introductory gerund word group: a word group that is marked by -ing. Searching for all occurrences of -ing (by searching for the string ing followed by a space) will enable the writer to determine if a comma is present where needed. In the same way, search for infinitive phrases by searching for the word to.
Using the search function in this way is akin to using a spelling or style checker: the computer takes care of the mundane routine of locating the feature, but it remains to the writer to determine if the usage is correct in this case or not. Consequently, the writer looks to context‹not at the word or feature itself, but how it is being used, which is the trick to punctuation in the first place.

In this way, the writer can refine her understanding of mis-learned rules‹such as always using a comma before and‹in the context of her own writing.

Comments
There are severe limits to searching with the word processor. Some cues are so broad that searching is more of a bother than an ease. With prepositional and adverbial clauses and subordinated phrases, for

more of a bother than an ease. With prepositional and adverbial clauses and subordinated phrases, for example, the search is difficult: there are too many prepositions, adverbs, and subordinators. Checking for commas with coordinators is more workable, however, as there are only seven coordinators to contend with. Tutors can suggest searching for common subordinators, but this is done more to teach what the writer must herself look for in proofreading rather than as a sure-fire fix technique.

Searching for patterns addresses an issue that Dobrin takes up in his critique of style checkers. He points out that style checkers are less than useful because they spot correct constructions as well incorrect ones, and the writer is forced to sort out the wheat from the chaff ("Computers and the Techniques of Writing"). In many style checkers this is true, in part because the programs generalize too broadly, checking for a number of possible problems that writers might have. However, under the eye of a tutor or teacher, particular students can create their own style checkers by devising a search strategy to suit the problem at hand, and ignore other possible checks. In such a case, that the search function finds correct uses as well as incorrect ones becomes a benefit, as the tutor can help the student refine her rationale for spotting and correcting the problem: We learn how to deal with errors by learning to apply the rules in context, making ever more fine distinctions between correct and incorrect constructions.

8. Help the writer compose a search strategy.
Creating a search strategy demands that the tutor discover a pattern of error so to help the student devise the strategy to address it. Rather than spuriously searching for every possible error‹a proofreading job better suited to working with a print out‹creating a search strategy helps the writer and tutor focus on persistant errors, thus making each editing session a lesson.

- ☐ The student who often creates fragments only when she uses subordinators and gerunds can use a search technique‹along with a list of common subordinators‹that addresses her particular problems.
- ☐ The student who is learning to use logical connectors with semi-colons‹however, therefore, consequently, and the like‹can look for those words to check the semi-colon and comma.
- ☐ The student who tends to create long chains of sentences linked with coordinators can go a searching for and and but.
- ☐ And, of course, she who creates comma splices can look for commas.

Comments
Using a search function for proofreading serves best when it is tightly focused‹created ad hoc to address the writer's particular problem at this particular time‹rather than when taught as a general procedure. I encourage tutors to help the writer create a search strategy, writing out the steps and the patterns to search for right on the word processor, saving the document, and printing it as the student's own guide. This can take some time‹perhaps a half an hour‹but because the writer has such an active part in creating the strategy, the investment in time for her seems to encourage her to use the strategy, and the student uses the opportunity to begin to understand her own writing.

At the same time, using this technique demands that the tutor or teacher inspect the text closely, looking for patterns of error and regularities of mistakes that can be picked up by the computer, and refining the pattern as closely as possible. Many students who write fragments do so only when they use subordinators; consequently, searching for subordinators will spot the fragments.

9. To check unity and organization, use the search and replace function to find and mark key words in the text.
Another use for the search function derives from text analysis (Thury, Tools), as well as notions of

hypertext (Joyce, "Siren Shapes"). A text will have key terms or phrases that indicate its general subject, and will use those key terms to create a coherence that cuts across the linear structure of the text iself.

For instance, a paper on swimming might contain key terms that name different kinds of strokes. A tutor begins by determining, roughly, the direction of the paper by looking for such key words, with the intent in mind of creating a search strategy that will pick up and illustrate a pattern of use of the key words.

The tutor will ask the writer to search for the important words, adding, in the replace function, a notable marker: a line of asterisks, or changing the words to all capital letters.

After the text is marked in this way, tutor and writer look for recurrences of the key terms, both in groupings (such as a paragraph that describes the butterfly stroke being keyed by the use of the term in the first or second sentence and perhaps in the last), and in variation (such as when the key word butterfly shows up again in a paragraph on the crawl, the tutor and writer may study how the word is used in context, as a point of comparison, say).

Those teaching the traditional Five-Paragraph Theme organization based on an enumerative thesis statement (on the order of "This is a Good Thing because x, y, and z."), can help the writer envision the organization that the thesis foretells. Have the writer search for the three key terms or phrases of the thesis sentence to verify that they show up in the expected places and in the expected order in the rest of the text.

Comments
It might be argued that searching a Five-Paragraph Theme for key terms is a mundane use of $1,000 - $1,500 worth of equipment. After all, who needs a machine to keep in mind, for three to five minutes, the subject of a paper? Who needs a machine to compare a sentence in the first paragraph with sentences in paragraphs two, three, and four? But this bespeaks more the simple mindedness of the Five-Paragraph Theme than it condemns the technique itself. Anyone who has used a concordance has a sense of what collected searches can illustrate. Try searching the text of Romeo and Juliet for words that name the parts of the face and body‹either by eye, by machine, or by concordance; you might be surprised. Now consider what an active concordance of a paper in progress can tell you about it.

Searching for keywords and marking them in the text helps the writer re-gather ideas that might be scattered through it, either moving sentences or paragraphs from one place in the text to another, or rewriting sentences so that the use of the term suits the local context in which it is used.

This approach is particularly effective in working towards a revision from a first draft. Because the limited size of the screen keeps writers from seeing what they have written two or three paragraphs before, and because the writing scrolls off the top of the screen as it is written, first drafts written on word processors tend to sprawl as the writer either works towards her meaning, or moves away from her first tentative thesis. Repetitions occur as the writer tries out various phrasings and constructions (a virtue as the writer has a choice to make). Possible key sentences that may well generate more writing get lost in the gray lines. Teachers such as Elbow, Murray and others teach students to re-read their early drafts looking for key terms, phrases that interest them, new starting points. Searching for key terms lets the writer explore her draft as she decides what her key terms are this time, and then discovers how she has used them, and how she might use them further to get a handle on organizing the paper using the terms of the writing itself.

10. To teach drafting and discovery, exchange keyboards
Switching keyboards or monitors can enable a number of techniques for drafting and discovery.

The idea is this: Set up two machines so that writer and tutor can telegraph to one another: What the writer types should show up on the tutor's machine, and what the tutor types should show on the writer's machine. Usually, all this involves is swapping the keyboards plugged into the machines or exchanging the monitors.

The writer need not be overly concerned with punctuation or spelling or grammar. The tutor assures her that her text will be readable.

The writer writes, either as in freewriting or in response to prompts given by the tutor, who is reading the material the writer types. When the writer bogs down, she signals this by typing a number of question marks; the tutor can then prompt her in any number of ways:

- Paraphrasing the writer

A tutor might remind the writer what she was saying, half-paraphrasing it for her: "You were saying that swimming is not only fun, but a real chore tooŠ"

Tutor prompts best serve the writer when they suggest a connection that the tutor sees but that writer may not yet, when they let the writer explore not only the subject but suggest a principle of organization, a transition, a comparison. It is not enough to prompt with "You were saying that swimming is a choreŠ" or "You were talking about swimmingŠ" While these comments might get the writer back on track, better comments will show a reader at work, asking questions that will help the writer connect. "You said that swimming is a chore and were giving an example of how big a chore it isŠ" or "You were saying the swimming is a chore, but earlier you mentioned how you really enjoyed it. It seems to be both to you. How might you explain that?"

- Asking questions of the writer

The tutor can ask questions about the subject, questions designed (on the spot and emerging from the writer's responses) to elicit examples, details, particulars within the context begin established by the writer. "You said that swimming can build character. Can you give me some particulars? Have you got an occasion in mind in which you applied something that you learned from swimming?"

It is important, here, to use the writer's words and phrases to generate the particulars, while at the same time providing a means of generating those particulars. Asking for "examples" is usually not enough to help the writer get down to substantives‹especially with such banal statements as "Swimming builds character." Too often, the writer will start creating straw-people acting in straw situations. Asking, instead, for an occasion in which the writer found her character built might help her get the statement (a cliché, after all) under control.

Of course, the writer might not be able to come up with anything and can respond to the tutor's query with question marks. The tutor can redirect her then, with something like, "Don't worry. We'll come back to it later. Try thisŠ" Or a tutor might help her explore the statement in other ways, by asking, say, to list come characteristics of "character" and then re-approaching the problem.

- Using heuristic questions

The tutor can heuristic questions drawn from the topoi or Burke's pentad, or through analogies and so on to help the writer explore her subject.

In these cases, the tutor has the advantage over the text book questions, as a tutor can phrase the questions employing the writer's terms rather than the generic questions, and tool the questions to promote more exploration beyond the surface response. Rather than the textbook form of "What else compares with your subject?" the tutor can remark, "You said swimming was a unique sport. But what other sports could you compare swimming to?" giving the question a context that the textbook set of questions cannot anticipate.

At the end of a session of switched keyboards, both tutor and writer print out their respective files, and the writer gleans from both the record and the experience what she might use.

Comments
Switching keyboards might be seen as a Poor Lab's local area network. But there's more virtue in the technique than cheap connections. Tutor and writer‹or writer and writer, for two writers can perform this themselves‹must be near each other, sitting beside or across from one another, which fosters a kind of double collaboration: they can write to one another, but they can talk as well. (Not to mention that this collaboration works in real time, without the distracting delays networks can cause.) The virtues of written, as opposed to spoken, dialogue apply here: the need to elaborate simple statements in response to the reader, the working out of roles in the communicative relation (if you're of that mind), the evolution of ideas from general impression to reformed statements, the development of both the subject that the writer is working on and of a metalanguage with which to discuss that subject. I find that students and tutors concentrate not at all on these matters, however, but simply enjoy working out the problems, once they get past the first awkwardness of not being able to see their writing on their own screen; and they will write all hour on a subject without knowing that an hour's gone by. In a classroom where students tend to shy away from prewriting for a fast first draft, this technique lets them perform the first exploration in the guise of discussing it with someone else; it makes, that is, prewriting meaningful.

Tutoring by exchanged keyboards addresses one of the bigger problems in tutoring: working with the student who, out of apprehension, doubt, or laziness, is waiting for the tutor to tell her what to say. When keyboards are switched, the tutor can easily take the role of responder without the student being aware that this is happening. The student must initiate the conversation, while the tutor responds to what has been written in paraphrasing, in questions, in prompts for examples. And as soon as the reticent student begins to generate her own statements, the tutor can help her discover how she can use those statements in her own writing.

When it comes to tutoring with exchanged keyboards the tutor needs to consider how to direct the student in generating material that she might use; the tutor needs to consider what the purpose of the paper is, needs to read the emerging prose for its signs of where the writer is at the moment and where she might go. But the tutor has plenty of time to come up with questions and develop an approach as the student writes, making it easier this way than working in speech alone.

A good session of switched keyboards produces, on the tutor's machine, a set of notes, some initial formulations, some specifics, and even a paragraph or two that the writer can use in starting a draft. Save the student's file and transfer it to her disk, as well as printing it out.

Conclusions

Variations of tutoring techniques on word processing are relatively easy to come up with when we envision the computer text as soft, maliable, changeable, and see the computer as a device with which to demonstrate and dramatize, manipulate, tool and retool prose. Of course it is, as well, what one student of mine calls "a pretty-print." But we are beginning to understand that printing prettily isn't quite enough;

of mine calls "a pretty-print." But we are beginning to understand that printing prettily isn't quite enough; and so, I think, are our students. "What's the point," they sometimes ask with a sour face, "of doing this on a machine when I can do it just as well on paper?" This is a valid question, one asked not only by students but by faculty and administrators. I, for one, want to give my students a better answer than an implicit "Because I say so," and my colleagues and administrators more than simple enthusiasm. But the students don't want an explanation so much as a demonstration that, indeed, they can do it better on a machine than on paper: not just easier, but better. I trust that my colleagues and administrators will, if the students find the machine useful, follow on.

And finding the machine useful means putting not only the machines in the hands of the students, and keeping our hands off them, but also putting techniques in their hands‹or minds‹as well.

Hands off refers not just to the keyboard but to meaning. When in the middle of creating a text, intent and meaning are just emerging. The text, like meaning, is volitile, and we can too easily quash a meaning, and a writer, by simply remarking on the passage. But to do so is to second guess the writer, whose stated meaning may not yet line up with her intended meaning. Whether it is the role of a teacher to prescribe meaning may be open to debate, but it is not the role of a peer tutor or of a teacher professing to work in a writing workshop. The approach is, then, to turn the necessary distance we must hold from the text from a liability into a virtue.

There are only a few principles at work in these techniques: that of isolating units, of expanding from any given point, of letting the machine find features that signal either a difficulty or strength, and that of setting things up so the the writer works the machine, and in working the machine also manipulates the text to discover her own designs. But in all of them, the writer maintains control of both text and machine.

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The Techniques

- ☐ Scroll to frame a section of text.
- ☐ Break the seamless text into units‹paragraphs, sentences, sections‹to create new openings for writing and to visualize organization and development.
- ☐ Develop paragraphs by writing a screenful of text from a single sentence; or place the cursor between two sentences and write your way from the first to the last.
- ☐ Copy and paste a thesis sentence in front of each paragraph. Compare each paragraph to the thesis.
- ☐ Copy and paste a key sentence from each paragraph, or a phrase from the key sentences, into a list or outline. Consider the order of the sentences or phrases. Try out variations of order.
- ☐ Copy and paste a section of the text--a sentence or paragraph. Then create variations on the original: rewrite the sentence or paragraph. Reorder sentences within paragraphs. Create new paragraphs using sentences from others. Reorder paragraphs. Compare the variations with the original. Choose.
- ☐ Search for sentence features that cause problems for you: using *-ing* words, infinitives ("to" followed by a verb), logical transitions (therefore, consequently, thus, etc.). Check the punctuation

at these points.

- ☐ Create a strategy for searching for a particular sentence difficulty or to check a particular punctuation pattern. Compose the strategy as a list of instructions. Save the instructions. Print them out. See if they work by using them.
- ☐ Search for key words in the text. Where to they occur? How are they grouped and gathered? Are they scattered throughout the text? Can you find any patterns to their occurance? Can you find any variations?
- ☐ Exchange keyboards with another writer. Write. If you bog down, ask the other writer for help by typing question marks. Have the other writer tell you what you were writing about and ask you questions about what you've written. Print out both files. Use the printout to help you write a paper.

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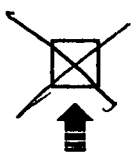

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