News flash: *Ten Easy Steps* don't "practically guarantee poor student writing" after all!

A faculty member responds to Diane Boehm, director of writing programs, who wrote an article titled "How to Guarantee Poor Student Writing— Without Even Trying!" that was included in the February 1996 issue of The Literacy Link.

by Drew Hinderer
Professor of Philosophy

You owe me dinner, Diane Boehm. At least, I think you do. You see, I do follow most, if not all, of your "Ten Easy Steps to Practically Guarantee Poor Student Writing," yet routinely get more than five well written papers.

In fact, I've just finished grading forty take home essay exams with questions like "Citing relevant passages from Chan's *Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, explain the Taoist concept of *wu wei*. Do you think *wu wei* has any application to your life? Why or why not?" And a substantial majority of those essays were not only reasonably competent, but actually thoughtful and interesting. Let me explain.

1. Normally I do accept first drafts, or rather "final products only"—no early drafts, no revisions, et. al. It's not that I don't want to develop my arm strength. It's that I want students to get used to the idea that life doesn't normally offer them second, third, or fourth chances to rewrite their work. I have been told that it is unfair of me to require students to come in and talk with me about their writing without giving them the opportunity to incorporate the corrections I suggest into a rewrite for a higher grade. But I would rather teach my students to hold themselves to demanding standards of accomplishment the first time than to turn in ill considered, unedit-

ed, and otherwise sloppy work with the expectation that they can fix it later.

2. I do ask my students to maintain confidentiality about their own work once they begin writing. I also encourage them to share their class notes and debate their ideas with each other as they prepare to write precisely because "we all know how helpful feedback on drafts, or conversations about our ideas, can be." Unfortunately, too many of my students also know how helpful it can be to turn over responsibilities for their own work to others—students, writing tutors, English majors, parents, faculty—if we encourage them to do so. And I do not want to risk allowing them to become dependent on support that, all too often, will not be available when they leave the university.

3. I do assume that the writing process of most of my students is, if not the same in all details, certainly similar to mine in important respects. They will need to read course material, think about it, daydream, jot down ideas, answer the telephone, toss away ideas that don't work, write, pace around the room, come back later, edit, revise, rewrite, decide whether the word they're looking for is "effect" or "affect" and so on. But I do not attempt to dictate any very specific writing strategies, such as "detailed three-page outline(s) before drafting any document." I write better to original instrument recordings of Haydn symphonies than to Clint Black or Mariah Carey, but I don't think I ought to compel others to do so as well. (But I do recommend it.)

4. Ok, ok, I do go over writing expectations, answer questions, and provide examples in class. But I do not waste class time doing it. Having done this much, I defer further coaching to office hours. Confucius says "If I show my students one corner of

a rectangle and they cannot come back with the other three, I *should not go over it again*." (Remember what I've just been grading.) I'm not as tough as Confucius. But I don't think it's asking too much to expect those students who do not get it the first time to exert themselves outside of class.

5. I do circle errors without explaining exactly what they are. As you know, merely identifying errors, and telling students what they are, does little to encourage good writing, or even to encourage fewer errors. But when I coach my students during office hours, I find that they are able to identify the problem I've circled about 70% of the time. And hearing them explain to me why pronoun disagreements can generate confusion, or why paragraphs need coherence does seem to help them, even as it restores my confidence in the writing instruction they have received.

6. And 7. You've got me here too. It takes me about 15 minutes per Asian exam, mostly because I write very extended responses. Most of these are efforts to continue the conversation. Of course, it *is* important to praise what is praiseworthy. But it is not unimportant to identify problems. Very sadly, among other, better, reasons, unless one identifies problems one opens oneself up to grade grievances. I don't like practicing defensive teaching, but, like my medical friends, I understand the problem that leads to it. By the way, how are we going to sell writing across the curriculum to our colleagues who, like me, have 40 people in their classes, when they see that my failure to follow rules 6. and 7. has cost me over 10 hours of work?

8. I do encourage my students to use seven syllable words when nothing else will do as well. Not only that, I even

Cyberteaching: Taking your students on-line

As our access to technology continues to expand, many of us are eager to experiment with new strategies in our classes. We would like to share our experiences with several strategies we have tried—and invite you to share with us—on-line strategies you are using with your students.

On-line Chat Groups
by Diane Boehm
Director of Writing Programs

In English 304, Technical Report Writing, I wanted to stimulate dialogue among students about topics in the course. On-line chat groups allowed me to structure this dialogue in a way that has created unique learning experiences.

One of the two class sessions each week meets in the computer lab, so all I needed was a user ID for each student, and a half hour at our first class meeting in the lab to introduce students to E-mail. Students who were novices learned by watching those who were already experienced.

I set up chat groups with four students in each; I included myself in each group also, so that I could monitor and print out the dialogue each week. On the course calendar, I assigned a dialogue topic related to the readings and assignments for each week, topics such as these:
* How important is audience awareness and analysis?
* How do computers affect the writing process?
* Does bias-free language matter?

I provided a hand-out with step-by-step guidelines for the students:

1. Responsibility for opening the chat will rotate down the list; each week, the next person on the list begins the dialogue. The person at the top of the list should set up the *distribution list* in his/her *address-book* (I provided instructions), and open the first dialogue. Each person should then enter the distribution list in his/her own address book.

2. Chat on-line about the topic outlined on the syllabus.

3. *Reply* to the previous message (R) rather than compose a new message. *Include original message in reply. Reply to all recipients.* These steps will insure that all comments are kept together and sent to the group.

4. Identify your responses by first name at the end of your reply.

5. Post by the due date each week. I will then print out each group's dialogue, read it, and bring a copy to class.

The dialogues are not formally graded, but I incorporate comments from them int class discussion, and E-mail personal responses when students ask a provocative question or contribute particularly insightful responses. How are the chat groups working? I am pleased with what I am observing:
* Students are "talking about" the topics of the course, but in written form;
* Every student has a voice; every student participates in our dialogues;
* Student's respond to **each other's** ideas, rather than just to the teacher's;
* Students are getting another type of writing experience beyond the graded assignments; I am able to observe how students write in varied contexts;
* Students are learning the conventions of E-mail and Internet use, essential skills for technical writers;
* Students are working collaboratively to reinforce and challenge each other's thinking; questions and issues are raised on-line which would never surface in ordinary class discussion;
* As students (many of whom are employed in professional positions) share their experiences, they are teaching each other—about workplaces, about standards and expectations for writing in those workplaces, about varieties of formats and presentation styles in different workplace cultures.

If you would like to see our class in action, join us in Z230 any Wednesday night from 5:30-6:50, or stop by my office (W202) for print-outs of our dialogues.

Cyberspace has opened up possibilities we didn't have before; I believe it has enhanced student learning—and teacher learning, as well.

The Paperless Class
by Chuck Garrison
Associate Professor of Computer Science

In CS 190, Using the Internet, last semester (now CS 101), I wanted the Internet to become the teaching/communication link between me and the students;

"Ten Easy Steps" (Continued from page 1)

expect them to learn Chinese (e.g. *wu wei*), Sanskrit (e.g. *rta*) and Greek (e.g. *logos*) jargon ("specialized or technical language"). I'm even impressed when they use it effectively, or, as sometimes happens, when they use it with wisdom.

9. I do "structure assignments so students are writing only for me, the teacher." You see, I think writing to me about Asian philosophy is a real purpose, and I even count myself as a real audience inhabiting the real world. (Do you want to debate ontology with me?) Knowing that I, and I alone, am their audience not only enables my students to gear their style to expectations I make explicit, but also enables them to be honest and unembarrassed about exploring ideas and advancing hypotheses they fear might offend or provoke humiliation from other students.

10. I do require students to write on topics I am interested in, though I always allow at least some choice. If I am not interested in the topics I assign, to what a purgatory I condemn us all. And surely one important reason to teach Asian Traditions is precisely to infect my students with what I am interested in, which is also to invite them to make those ideas personally meaningful to them.

There you have it: by conscientiously following, in one way or another, virtually all of your "ten easy, foolproof steps to guarantee poor papers" I have managed not only to "get more than five well-written papers," but actually to get so many that it looks like grade inflation. I hope no one finds out what a pushover I really am. Meanwhile, I'm free most Tuesday evenings after class. Since you're buying, how about Cafe Edward? I'll select the wine.

Zahnow Library and the Internet

By Scott A. Mellendorf
Reference & Internet Librarian

The United States Department of Defense developed the Internet in the late 1960s. This "network of networks" began as an experiment for department researchers to transfer electronic files via a computer network.

The project, originally funded by the National Science Foundation, later added more academic institutions to the network. The mid 1990s brought businesses, online services, and organizations online. This additional traffic helped to explode use and interest to its present status. Although accurate Internet user numbers are difficult to obtain, one recent Nielsen survey shows there are 24 million users in the United States and Canada alone[1].

Along with continual growth in the Internet's user base, navigation tools used to "surf the Net" have also improved. World Wide Web browsers and protocols now replace line command "telnet" and "file transfer protocol" (FTP) sessions. Search engines make it easier to locate information on the Internet.

The application of the World Wide Web had a dramatic influence on the Internet's current popularity. It provides users with the ability to jump from resource to resource via hypertext links. Graphical browsers like Netscape bring the use of hypermedia (graphics, video, audio, text) to the user's desktop. Tom Zantow, Head of Cataloging at Zahnow Library, put it best by saying "the World-Wide Web did for the Internet what Windows did for DOS."

Although these changes and growth in the Internet are both exciting and frustrating, the Zahnow Library staff, along with many others across campus, are committed to keeping pace with what the Internet has to offer and how to best use it. Internet related services keep users aware of its potential as a research tool. The following paragraphs describe the primary services currently offered at the library.

Library staff conducted Basic Internet Orientation sessions to SVSU students, faculty, and staff in 1993. This semester, in-depth orientations supplement the Basic sessions. These additions focus on advanced uses of Internet search, navigation, and functional tools. Two detailed sessions on World Wide Web browsers give users more information on how to use them efficiently. Another session includes an electronic file retrieval and transfer demonstration.

LIBLINE, an electronic newsletter sent via E-mail to subscribers only, arrived in April of 1995. This service informs SVSU and area network users of what the Library is doing with the Internet. It also functions as a tool that distributes possible useful Net resources each month to its subscribers. The "Cyberguest" column provides a forum for others on campus to share thoughts on how to best use this technology in an academic environment.

Public access to the Internet and World Wide Web is now a reality at Zahnow Library. A text-based computer workstation for searching the Internet appeared in the Fall of 1993. This workstation, known as SLIC (Selective Libraries & Internet Catalogs), was recently upgraded to provide Library users with a graphical browser (Netscape).

Webpages produced by staff direct users to lists of Library Catalogs, Search Tools, Headline News & Weather, and World Wide Web resources arranged by subject. Textual Internet access is now available from all 15 public access ValCat online catalog terminals. Specific Internet resources reside under the catalog's Internet Resources option.

Although Internet related library services have been in place for a few years, they remain under constant evaluation and change. The Library staff discusses how to best meet the Library's mission and the user's Internet research needs continuously. Please let us know what you think of the current services. Also feel free to submit suggestions for other Internet related services.

Send comments to Scott Mellendorf (ext. 7052) or (mel@tardis.svsu.edu) and/or Anita Dey (ext. 5634) or (adey@tardis.svsu.edu).

References
[1] Simpson, David. "Serious net study, finally." *Datamation.* 41 Dec. 1995: 24.

Ask the Advocate

The following questions have been sent to *Literacy Link* by a concerned faculty member, and this person would like responses from English faculty as well as any other faculty using writing in their classrooms. Brief responses will appear in the next issue of *Literacy Link,* while longer, more detailed answers will be passed along to the faculty member.

"Ask the Advocate" will be a regular feature of *Literacy Link,* and we welcome your questions and responses. Please send them to Jim Geistman and Lynne Graft in S329; questions and responses can also be E-mailed to lrgraft@tardis.svsu.edu.

#1: Dear Writing Advocate:

I keep hearing about how important it is to use writing in my classes. I'm certainly not about to advance illiteracy as a desirable state, but frankly as an instructor of (insert discipline name here), I don't feel it's my job to teach writing—I feel that that is the job of the English faculty. Why would you expect faculty who are not trained in a subject to teach it?

#2: Dear Writing Advocate:

I would like to use more writing projects in my classes, but frankly I have plenty to do right now, and I'm reluctant to take on a lot more grading than I already do. It's always been my assumption that if I ask students to do writing inside or outside of class, it has to be part of the course grade. This means that any writing I assign becomes part of my grading responsibilities. That means more work for me, and I've already got plenty.

What would you advise?

Promoting an awareness of cognitive processes: Writing as a tool

by David K. Pugalee
Assistant Professor of Teacher Education

One of the goals which we all share, regardless of our particular disciplines and interests, is to facilitate and promote the ability of our students to take responsibility for their own learning. One of the hallmarks of this goal is the students' awareness of their own thinking processes as they engage in learning.

This awareness is sometimes referred to as metacognition. Metacognition involves students' awareness of self-regulation of their cognitive processes (Campione et al., 1989). The term is used to encompass the awareness of the student in such mental processes as planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Fortunato et al., 1991).

Some of the difficulties related to research involving metacognition are that the word means different things to different individuals. Allen (1991) argues that metacognition is generally viewed as falling into two categories: knowledge of cognition and control of cognition. Knowledge of cognition includes personal beliefs about one's role as a learner, knowledge about the scope, requirements and difficulty of the task at hand, the knowledge of the strategies available and their potential benefit.

The control of cognition involves a variety of decisions and strategies which are influenced by one's knowledge of cognition. In mathematics, these controls include such identifiable behaviors as predicting, planning, revising, selecting, checking, guessing, classifying, etc..

The link between metacognition and success in mathematical problem solving is also understood by Artzt and Armour-Thomas (1992), Quinto and Weener (1983), and Linn (1987). Artzt and Armour-Thomas point to a continuous interplay between cognitive and metacognitive behaviors as a characteristic of successful problem solving. Students returning several times to episodes of reading, understanding, exploring, analyzing, planning, implementing, and verifying were often observed in those who performed successfully.

The development of this level of self-monitoring can occur through several vehicles. Questioning techniques were shown by Schoenfeld (1987) to be efficient in promoting metacognition in mathematics problem solving. He used four techniques in the classroom to focus on metacognitive behaviors. Videotapes were used to promote self-awareness as students watched and discussed the behaviors they and their classmates engaged in during problem solving activities. Secondly, the teacher modeled effective or 'expert' techniques.

The third technique involved discussions which included the whole class with the teacher serving as moderator. Several proposed solutions are sought and the class must focus to control processes in arriving at the solution. The discussions are later analyzed and the processes selected are evaluated for efficiency.

The fourth technique is small group problem solving. During the group sessions, the teacher serves as a coach who may ask any student to describe what the group is doing, to answer why they are doing it, and to tell how it will help them reach a solution. Schoenfeld later monitored the students as they solved problems and found that students spent less time on their initial attempt but evaluated their work and revised their actions and solutions in response to monitoring behaviors.

Writing has been reported by several researchers to be a valuable tool in the development of metacognition abilities. Linn (1987) asserts that metacognitive ability is strengthened when the student views the learning process as active, constructive, cumulative and goal oriented. She further establishes that research supports the premise that writing can serve to enhance students' metacognitive abilities.

The research done by Naomi Allen (1991) provides additional support for the role of writing in development of metacognitive abilities. In her study of four developmental algebra classes at a Southern university, one class was given daily impromptu expressive writing prompts and one class was given the typical lecture along with reflective questioning, one class was only asked to indicate whether they felt their work was correct, and one class served as a control with no writing activities. On tests, the students were asked to assess their beliefs about the correctness of their answers.

The writing group was able to assess at a significantly more positive rate than the lecture and control groups. Dr. Allen concluded that "if metacognitive skills are a necessary condition for successful mathematics performance, the use of writing may provide the process for attaining these essential skills" (page viii).

In my own personal research involving high school Algebra students, I found that the use of journal writing as a vehicle through which students described their approaches to solving non-routine mathematical problems was an effective method of promoting metacognitive behaviors. In a qualitative analysis of the resulting written data, a metacognitive framework was identified which paralleled the one identified by Garafalo and Lester (1985) in their seminal study involving mathematical problem solving.

The categories which emerged were orientation, organization, execution, and verification. In the study, students alternated between a "talk-aloud" approach where they verbalized their thoughts while solving a problem and a journal writing approach where they wrote about their thought processes while solving a problem. A test of significance between these two modes was computed to test the difference in the success rates of the two methods. A resulting z-score of 2.2126 (p<.05) demonstrated that students who engaged in writing performed significantly better.

What is the message of such studies for educators? First, metacognition is an essential element in successful learning situations. Problem solving research has identified this self-regulation of cognitive activity as a primary influence in an individual's ability to successfully engage in mathematical problem solving. Other research substantiates that of metacognitive behaviors, writing appears to be a promising vehicle for providing the types of experiences necessary to promote the development of behaviors which are considered part of the domain of metacognitive actions.

As we explore all possible avenues to help us reach our goals, let us keep in mind the types of learners we want to emerge from our classes and various vehicles which will assist us in reaching our destination.

For a list of references, please contact David Pugalee at ext. 7734.

Group papers
(Continued from page 5)

However, I do not know whether, by creating this situation, I have created an environment that leads to poor writing.

Is there any research out there which would tell me **when** I should use a group writing assignment? Is there anything which would tell me **how** such an assignment should be structured, or what I as an instructor can do to facilitate the group's performance? Is there software available which would facilitate the group's writing of the paper? I view the group's creation of the paper as primarily an intermediate step, with the ultimate goal of creating a joint product and process that members can then diagnose. In doing this, I now find myself wondering whether this is appropriate as a writing task per se.

Your comments and reactions will be welcomed.

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