

Purdue Writing Lab Report

1989-1990

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Writing Lab Report: 1989-90

Summary

Statistics for use of the English Department's Writing Lab for the fall and spring semesters, 1989-90, indicate that the Writing Lab served 9,157 students, instructors, and others who phoned in (locally or from across the nation) to our Grammar Hotline. Judging from our evaluations, summarized in Attachment C to this report, we are pleased to report that over 95% of the students reported improvement in writing skills and over 98% of the instructors agreed that our instruction resulted in students' improvement.

Our major emphasis continued to be that of providing the one-to-one, individualized contact that writers need to develop their skills. We offered reader response, asked and answered questions, offered writing strategies, diagnosed and dealt with writing problems, and engaged in collaborative conversations about writing. While the majority of our tutoring is with students enrolled in writing courses in the English Department, we also provided writing help with assignments in composition courses and courses in other departments at Purdue.

This report will discuss the work of the Writing Lab in terms of 1) our staffing and services, with a listing of staff, a review of our various services, and a summary of noteworthy accomplishments for the year; 2) statistics, with a summary table and a discussion of trends revealed by the data; 3) evaluations; and 4) future trends.

1. Staffing and Services

A. Staffing

This year's Lab staff consisted of fifteen graduate teaching assistants and myself, plus a receptionist, a secretary, work/study assistance with clerical tasks, a computer consultant, and two groups of undergraduate peer tutors (one group funded by the English Department to tutor English 100 students and the other group funded by other university sources to assist students with business writing and resumes). The Lab was open five days a week, plus three evenings, for a total of 54 hours/week.

B. Services

Together, the instructional staff offered tutorials, drop-in assistance on a first-come/first-served basis, workshops, Traveling Teacher sessions in writing classes and in other classrooms across campus, instructional handouts, self-instruction tapes, tutor training practicums, a grammar hotline, computers for word processing and computer-assisted-instruction, and a library of books, journals, and reference materials.

The population whom we served represents a wide variety of writers and teachers, including the following:

- Students enrolled in English Department writing courses (English 100, 101, 102, 103, 109, 304, 420, and 421)
- Students enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language courses (English 001, 002, and 1011)

- Students enrolled in a variety of literature courses in the English Department
- Students enrolled in a variety of Communication Department courses, particularly Communication 114, 212, 252, 324, 330, and 358
- Graduate students taking the English Proficiency Exam in the Office of Writing Review
- Students preparing resumes and job applications
- Students using computers for writing assignments, simulations, and self-instruction
- Students writing papers for a wide variety of courses in other departments (Courses in which there were five or more requests for lab services include AG ECON 331, BC 200, BIOL 232, CDFS 454, CDFS 602, CDFS 689, CPT 154, CPT 244, CSR 309, CE 597, ED 230, ED 311, ED 380, ED 480, FN 520, GS 290, HIST 152, HIST 515, IE 486, MGMT 458, POL SCI 130, POL SCI 460, POL SCI 561, PSY 240, PSY 285, SOC 312, SOC 602, SPV 577.)
- Students in three sections of practicum courses in tutoring writing (English 390 and 502W)
- Composition instructors who need professional journals, books, and instructional materials on teaching writing skills
- Purdue faculty who request assistance in adding writing skills to their courses

Other noteworthy accomplishments during the year include the following:

- Being funded by the Dean of Students Office for an additional tutor to work with learning disabled students
- Receiving scholarships for four undergraduate tutors to attend a regional writing centers conference and to report on their work
- Having two of our graduate student lab instructors finish advanced degrees and then accept positions as writing lab directors at other universities
- Having five of our graduate student lab instructors present papers at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, a national conference on composition, and four of our graduate student lab instructors present papers at the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference, a regional writing centers conference
- Having one of our graduate student lab instructors elected to the Board of the East Central Writing Centers Association
- Using desktop publishing facilities, provided by Donald Brown, Dean of Academic Services, to improve the instructional effectiveness of our instructional handouts
- Meeting with advisors across campus, Faculty Fellows, and student organizations to introduce the services of the Writing Lab and to review basic principles of effective writing
- Offering tutoring to journalism students by Charles Leslie (University Relations Office), who donated his time and expertise as a tutor for one evening each week

- Being featured in the *Journal and Courier*, the *Exponent*, and the *Liberal Arts Newsletter*
- Offering self-paced, non-credit courses on writing skills for people in the community
- Holding resume workshops for university-sponsored student organizations
- Hosting visitors from other campuses and high schools across the country who made on-site visits to study our Lab as a model for developing their own facilities. Visitors from Indiana University referred extensively to our Lab in reports and student newspaper articles as they prepare for a major expansion of their writing center
- Computerizing our record-keeping system
- Providing our facilities for a telecommunications project in which a student produced a videotape describing our Lab (which has already been mailed, at their request, to two other university writing labs and for a workshop for high school teachers)
- Receiving an internal grant from Donald Brown, Dean of Academic Services, to provide an upgrade to Macintosh word processing in the Writing Lab

2. Statistics

	Total no. of uses	Total no. of people
No. of tutorial appointments	2766	1573
No. of drop-in sessions	2428	1797
No. of student requests for instructional handouts	3321	2555
No. of uses of microcomputers	600	343
No. of self-instruction modules	495	265
No. of uses of Lab for writing room	412	316
No. of requests from English 100 students	2251	373
No. of instructor requests for handouts	201	125
No. of students attending workshops		42
No. of students attending Traveling Teacher sessions		1241
No. of grammar hotline calls		527
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin: 0;"> 12,474 9,157 </div>		

The data sorting reports from which these statistics were taken indicate that over 95% of all students who came in for tutorial help (for appointments or for drop-in sessions) came between one and four times. The number of appointments jumped 42% over last year, while the drop-in totals decreased about 3%. The use of handouts by students increased over 17% and by instructors over 45%, and the helpfulness of having instructional materials available was a recurring comment in both instructor and student evaluations. Given the extensive reductions in the duplicating budget for the Writing Lab for next year, this will present a major curtailment of services unless additional funds are found. The use of self-instructional modules increased over 66%, with over 105 more people using the equipment and tapes. With no funds for the coming year to replenish worn-out materials and equipment, the heaviest users, the English 109 students and students learning English as a second language, will experience major difficulties in completing assignments. Finally, we were pleased to note that while the number of students in English 100 using the Lab remained about the same, there was a 68% increase in the number of requests, indicating a closer coordination and use of the Lab by English 100 teachers.

3. Evaluations

As with past evaluations, teachers and students who filled out and returned questionnaires each semester continued to rate the Lab's services very highly, responding that our instruction was effective and that students' writing and their grades improved because of their Lab work. A summary of the responses is included as Attachment C to this report.

Teachers noted that the Lab performs a necessary service in providing the individualized instruction that writers need and that classroom instructors are not able to offer. Instructors also commented on the usefulness of the handouts as resources for their teaching, and visitors to our Lab requested copies as resources for other labs that are developing or expanding across the country. Traveling Teacher sessions were also noted as useful, and letters from faculty and student organizations around campus who requested sessions indicated how useful these workshops were. Student comments on the evaluations indicated that they valued the instruction, the tutors' ability to help them think and to find their own answers, the individual attention, the immediate feedback, and the friendly environment.

Except for three students who complained about tutors' responses being different than those of their teachers, the only other complaint—which recurred with alarming frequency—was that students were forced to wait for tutors or were unable to get sufficient help. As one student so aptly noted, in a large university like Purdue, there should be a larger staff and more room. Inadequate staffing continues to be a problem, one that results in keeping students waiting days or even weeks for appointments. Drop-in, during busy periods, can also meet waits of an hour or two.

4. Future Directions

As we prepare for 1990-91, it is clear that the Writing Lab has some on-going needs and new directions to explore. Funds for an Assistant Director for the coming year will allow us to improve tutor training, liaison work with the composition staff, clerical staff training, and other areas that have been inadequately tended to. We hope to demonstrate the need to turn this temporary, one-year appointment into a permanent half-time professional position.

In the past, a need for a budget was noted so that some planned growth and replacement of materials could begin. However, now that budgets are being instituted, it is clear that the result will be severely curtailed services. Duplicating of instructional materials will be limited to slightly more than half of last year's quota, and no additional funds are being provided either for replacing old instructional materials or equipment or purchasing new materials. If the Writing Lab is to continue in any viable way, funds will have to be sought. One possibility is to explore a minimal lab fee for the heaviest users of the Writing Lab, students in freshman composition.

We remain committed to our goal of having the Lab serve as a useful, effective, well-functioning tutorial service for Purdue students and as a nationally recognized model for writing labs across the country. We look forward to working with the new head of the English Department, Dr. Margaret Rowe, and we offer our deep appreciation and thanks to the retiring head, Dr. Leon Gottfried. His strong support of the Writing Lab encouraged us to continue our commitment to helping students become more proficient writers.

A. Comments from Teachers

- The papers turned in by students who had the good sense to take advantage of the...Writing Lab are clear, more coherent, and better organized than the rest. -A. Robillos (Comm.)
- All of my students who came to the lab showed improvement in various areas. The only complaint they ever made was having to wait for an appointment. -E. Sanders (English)
- [The most helpful form of assistance was the] detailed and personalized help for students who need more than the whole group and more than I can give in office hours. You were busy this year; I sometimes had to extend students' due dates so they could get your help before turning in final versions. -C.Pedretti (English)
- [My students] obviously value the fact that the Lab exists and sometimes even mention that its existence is one reason why "Purdue is such a great place." -E. Palfrey (English)
- I think you do a great job. -Prof. M. Gibney (Political Science)
- I especially appreciated the Traveling Teacher service. -A. Martinez-Alonso (English)
- The work you do is great....The only things I think you need more of are 1)room and 2)computers! -M. Levine-Foster (English)
- I am glad your service exists. Prof. K. Altergott (CDFS)
- As usual, my students benefited significantly from their work in the lab. -D. Holland (English)
- I really appreciate the help you gave to some of my students (especially in 420) last semester. But what helped me personally was the traveling teacher presentation....In effect, she taught me to teach that topic much better than I have been doing. -B. Burch (English)
- Your effectiveness was most evident through the improved writing style and coherent thought patterns exhibited in...my students' papers. Availability during "peak periods" of the semester of WL personnel seemed the biggest problem. -S. Bowers (English)
- The availability of ESL tutors is one of the most important features of the Writing Lab for us....It would be great if even more qualified tutors...could be added to the staff. - Prof. M. Berns (English)
- The Writing Lab is very useful, and I'm grateful for the help of the instructors. Keep it up. -S. White (English)
- Your services are wonderful. -Prof. R. Heslin (Psychology)
- I often don't have the time to provide the intensive help some of these students need. I appreciate the support that you offer me and my students. -T. Henning (English)
- Over half of my students have used the W.L., most more than once. My only complaints are with the tutors, or rather, lack of. There are not enough tutors to fill the demand, and the tutors you do have are overworked. -P. Hodson-Hutsell (English)

- My only small suggestion: provide more handouts for students to pick up and refer to at home. - E. Hoger (English)
- My class and I profited from the traveling teacher program....I consider the Lab tutors essential as a back-up. M. Jerison (English)
- I used the lab for handouts....The complaint I hear most often is how walk-in is always backed up. -R. Lee (English)
- Overall, I think the services are good. But, my students have been complaining to me all semester about how hard it is to get an appointment in the lab. -L. Yost (English)
- The lab has proven to be a good tool for improving students' written communication skills. -M. Moretti (Military Science)
- I noticed the improvement before he told me he had gotten help. Good job! Thanks! L. Foster (GS, Dean of Students Office)
- Intensive one-on-one appears to help most students. -J. Vantey (English)
- Lab has been very helpful in relieving me from having to teach students skills of composition. Especially recommended for foreign students. Keep up the good work! -Prof. R. Melson (Political Science)
- As usual, you need applause, not suggestions. Thanks to the Writing Lab...English 109 folks are, for the most part, free at last. -R. Child (English)
- Overall, the lab seemed to help most of my students, most particularly one who has raised his overall grade by two letters. -M Stuart (English)
- My students found the use of the Writing Lab extremely helpful. Some of my students showed enthusiastic responses to the assistance they received from the tutors by consulting the lab on frequent occasions. -T. Tesoro (English)
- As usual, the Writing Lab proved to be an invaluable resource for my students. They all received excellent help from the various tutors they saw. C. Ross (English)
- Jennifer's work improved vastly in the paper on which she received your help. She received an A whereas earlier she had gotten C's. Your help made a difference, I feel. As an instructor, I've seen Ina's writing improve a great deal due to help from the lab. I hope you all know that your work is very important. You really do make a difference. P. Harris (English)
- Materials and services are great. -J. Karbach (English)
- As a master's student in English, I encourage all my students to go there for help. Thank you. -S. Clements (English)
- You've done a fine job this semester—as usual. This semester the availability of good 420 handouts was appreciated; I used them extensively. I would like to see the number of Traveling Teacher sessions increased/coverage broadened. Otherwise, keep up the good work. -R. Adams (English)

B. Comments from Students

- She helped me focus on my topic and relate each idea clearly to the thesis. -N. Naibi
- What my writing lab instructor did was help me organize my thoughts. -A. Jordan
- It's too bad that you have to turn so many people down when they try and make appointments. There are lots of students that could really use your help. -K. Crawford
- I think Purdue students are fortunate to have the writing lab and I would really recommend it to anyone. -K.M. Oh
- I like the fact that the tutors make the writer work. Also, it is a very good resource for writing materials. I found it quite helpful. -W. Getka
- I think the writing lab is a great service that has been set up! I just think that more people could benefit from using it, but it may not be well enough publicized. -M. Harger
- It has helped me to develop my ideas more fully. The major problem is the difficulty of getting in. Expand the staff and hours. -L. Oxley
- The writing lab helped me beyond belief to organize my notecards for my research paper. I was totally lost when I got there and ended up organizing them exactly how I wanted them. -C. Borho
- I feel that the instructors are very helpful and beneficial. They help express your ideas instead of just lecture to you which makes you learn. -S. Semler
- I feel that the lab helped me to organize my thoughts. I liked the personal attention I received at the lab. -M. Pesut
- Helped make my paper more complete and let me do it instead of doing it for me. I received very thorough help. -C. Malirgo
- The lab and instructor helped me to be more clear with my ideas and helped me to follow a structured plan of writing papers. -S. Sanneman
- It was very hard to get an appointment since I couldn't get one for the week before my paper was due. I dropped in three times and couldn't get in then either. I finally got in the day before my paper was due. This didn't give me much time to consider what she said. -S. Dehn
- I think it's a great tool to have to help students. -J. Rittenhouse
- The lab has helped my writing style. -T. Fears
- I like the handouts for reference. I use them on every paper. -G. Paston
- The lab has helped me to understand how to write certain papers. I think that the lab is definitely a plus. -M. Kopitzke

- I know that quite a few times I tried to make appts., but they were booked up....I wish they could extend the hours to make the lab more available or if they'd get a larger staff because the lab really is helpful. -J. Poisson
- It gave me more ideas of how to write better and different techniques of getting my point across. -S. Meder
- The Writing Lab somewhat helped the style of my writing; however, it was quite difficult to receive the help because of the long drop-in waits. Trying to get an appt. is also hard because of the "we are booked for two weeks" response. By that time the paper would be due. -A. Griffith
- I think the lab needs to expand. It is very difficult to get an appointment. If there were more tutors available, more people could be accommodated. -S. Struble
- The help I received raised my grade from a D to an A. And I know more about how to go about a paper. -J. Shockley
- With such a large university it probably wouldn't hurt to have more instructors available. -R. Rankin
- I only went once and I think it got me on the right track to writing better papers. -C. Solomon
- It is very difficult to see a tutor. I have waited up to two-and-a-half hours. If there is some way waiting time could be cut, I am sure it would be appreciated. -M. Marta
- Helped me organize ideas and think more deeply about the subjects of my papers. -J. McKibben
- Not such a long time to wait for an appointment. -S. McConaha
- Since I hadn't written a paper in three years, the lab helped to refresh rules I had forgotten. -D. Woodward
- It taught me how to better organize my papers. -S. Ellinson
- Don't like how backed up the lab gets. Expand the writing lab would be a good idea. -B. Craycraft
- The help was great! The paper I received help from the Writing Lab, I received the highest grade on a paper in class. -M. Brown
- It helped me to expand my thoughts on the subject I was working on. -K. Prunty
- The lab helped me with my grammar, giving me new ideas, and helping me put my own ideas together. The only thing I don't like about the lab is the length of time I had to wait to get in it. -M. Lam
- The Writing Lab is very helpful in many ways. The handouts helped very much when writing my papers. I do not feel that there is enough instructors at the Lab. -N. Haidous
- The writing lab helped me with my writing techniques and paragraph writing. The only problem I found was the waiting time, which was too long. -J. Bastnagel

C. Summary of Evaluations

A. From instructors (percentages based on 606 responses)

1. Students' writing improvement:
 - great improvement 41%
 - some improvement 57%
 - no improvement 2%

2. Students' grade improvement:
 - one letter grade or more 62%
 - up to one letter grade 29%
 - none or less than one letter grade 9%

3. Students' attitude toward the Lab:
 - appreciation 46%
 - little or no feeling expressed 53%
 - resentment 1%

4. Feedback from Lab instructors:
 - excellent 69%
 - adequate 29%
 - little or none 2%

5. Evaluation of Writing Lab services:
 - very helpful 90%
 - somewhat helpful 10%
 - not helpful 0%

B. From students (percentages based on 502 responses)

1. Quality of instruction:
 - very helpful and clear 70%
 - adequate 28%
 - not helpful or clear 2%

2. Writing progress:
 - great deal of progress 47%
 - some progress 48%
 - no progress 5%

3. Grade improvement:
 - one letter or more 66%
 - up to one letter 24%
 - dropped or didn't change 10%