



gayle morris  
**sweetland writing center**  
university of michigan

Winter 2005

## Director's Letter Martha Vicinus

This newsletter illustrates the exceptional range of activities that the Sweetland Writing Center has been involved in over the past year. We are especially proud to announce our forthcoming "Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: A Cross-Disciplinary Conference on Writing," to be held September 23-25, 2005. The national conference is free and open to faculty, staff, and students, and will be an exciting opportunity to engage our students in a timely debate about what constitutes plagiarism, fair use, imitation, and copyright. We encourage faculty to integrate the conference into their courses, and students can participate in sessions relevant to their interests. Our Web site, [www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/conference/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/conference/), provides details of the conference; by the end of this semester, we will post an annotated bibliography of readings relevant to the conference. Please read our description of the conference on page five.

We are delighted to announce the arrival of Dr. Naomi Silver, our new Lecturer III, who returns to Michigan after many years in California. Naomi joins last year's hire, Matt Kelley, in strengthening our cohort of faculty who work with multi-lingual students. She will be playing an active role in our Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Program.

**1139 Angell Hall**

**764-0429**

**[swcinfo@umich.edu](mailto:swcinfo@umich.edu)**

**[www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/)**

**Writing Workshop by Appointment**

M,T,Th,F: 9am-5pm

W: 9am-12:30pm and 2:30-5pm

**Peer Tutoring Center Walk-In**

G219 Angell Hall

Sunday-Thursday: 7-11pm

**Online Writing and Learning (OWL)**

[www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/undergrads/support/owlform](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/undergrads/support/owlform)



Dr. Martha Vicinus

Eliza M Mosher Distinguished University Professor

As teachers of writing, we are especially concerned with helping English as a Second Language students write more effectively. Nik Frank-Lehrer, 2004 winner of Sweetland's undergraduate Callaway Writing Prize, eloquently describes his experience working with Hmong children over winter break. Judith Dyer, from the English Language Institute, and Matt Kelley, from Sweetland, have been working together to provide more effective tutorial sessions for our ESL students. Our successes (and failures) are here for you to consider.

Our other articles focus on how we learn to become better writers. Long-time Sweetland Lecturer, Ray McDaniel, traces the growing self-awareness of his students in English 228: What Is Writing?. Keith Pecor (Biology) and Lauren Caldwell (Classics) document their new attentiveness to links between teaching First-Year Writing courses and writing their dissertations and between their sense of isolation as graduate students and their sense of community as new teachers. In her interview, Judith Swan, from the Princeton Writing Program, articulates the importance of writing for all the disciplines. Dr. Swan has visited the Sweetland Writing Seminar for many years, and her presentations are always lucid, compelling accounts of why clear writing should matter not only to scientists, but to all of us.

## My Path to Sweetland Naomi Silver

I have been teaching writing for the last 15 years, mostly at the University of California, Irvine (where I received my Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 2001), but also at UCLA, Cal State Long Beach, and, for two years, at a private high school in Los Angeles. In fact, when I arrived in southern California from Chicago after college, my first official act as a graduate student—even before attending a graduate seminar—was to conduct the initial session of the “Intro to College Writing” course I would teach that quarter.

Looking out at my roomful of students, sitting where I had just a few short months before, I was terrified. Luckily, I managed a veneer of outward composure, restrained myself from bolting, and uttered some garbled words about the differences between high school writing and the college writing upon which they were now to embark. At the time, my understanding of these differences was fuzzy at best, but good training at Irvine, strong mentors, and, most of all, classroom experience have solidified my grasp of the ways we can employ process-based, student-centered approaches to initiate our students into what David Bartholomae calls the “discourse communities” of academic disciplines and their varied forms of argumentation and evidence.

As a Detroit native, coming to teach here in the Sweetland Writing Center feels like a return of sorts—although after living in California I don’t know if I’ll ever fully readjust to the weather! Teaching at Sweetland offers an exciting opportunity to continue the work on writing across the curriculum and bi-literate writers that I began in my last position as a lecturer in a cross-disciplinary humanities and writing program at UC Irvine. Growing out of my dissertation research on the tensions between homogeneity and difference in national, religious, and ethnic communities, as portrayed in French and American modernist literature, this work has led me to complicate the idea of the “discourse community” (following the insights of Joseph Harris, Mary Louise Pratt, and others) by attending to the “home” languages and “home” knowledges our students bring with them to college. I am interested in using this research to construct classrooms and writing assignments that can engage my students’ multiple discourses in order to bridge the gap between what can feel to them like two separate worlds.

From this research I’ve published articles on Henry James and on sacrificial communities, contributed short chapters on “Writing in the Disciplines” and “Rhetorical Reading” to the UC Irvine *Humanities Core*

*Course Writer’s Handbook*, and recently had the pleasure of attending the conference, “Writing Research in the Making,” in Santa Barbara, with two of my Sweetland Writing Center colleagues, Margaret Dean and Christine Modey. Sweetland is a wonderful place for collaboration. Right now, I’m enjoying my work with fellow members of Sweetland’s Peer Tutor Committee as we train upper-level undergraduates to become writing tutors to their peers, and in the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program, where I teach an interdisciplinary image-text course bringing together students in my First-Year Writing class with those in Mark Tucker’s LHSP arts and humanities course. I’m looking forward to exploring the other opportunities for teaching and research Sweetland and the University have to offer.



Dr. Naomi Silver  
Sweetland’s Newest Lecturer III

## Awareness through Writing Ray McDaniel

The title for the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program course I have taught for the past three winter terms describes as broad and bold an inquiry as I can imagine: “What Is Writing?” And while the question defeats easy answers, the hard-won discoveries of the Lloyd Hall students equal anything I have seen in over 10 years of teaching. The ambitions contained in this inquiry represent not only our collaborative curiosity about the lingua franca of the academy, but our interest in what it means to be a writer in the wider world as well.

Most of the students enrolled in English 228: What Is Writing? have just completed their first semester of college, though there are always a few sophomores and juniors as well. By virtue of their experiences with English 124 or 125, they have begun to appreciate the degree to which their next three-and-half years of study will be determined by acts of reading and writing that will challenge them in ways they have only begun to detect. But they also have started to learn that the disci-

plines to which they will be committing themselves each come with their own protocols and peculiarities.

Recalling my sense of this delicate balance from my first semester of teaching the course, I began my second approach to the class by writing one word on the board and asking the 36 students gathered there to simply explain the meaning of the word I'd written: "aware." The future engineers, businesspersons, curators, archivists, and attorneys answered quickly and thoroughly, rightly satisfied with their ability to document and complicate the definition of such a suggestive word. Capitalizing on the students' efforts to attach to the term as many plausible meanings as they could, I offered the meaning I had in mind: an appreciation of the fragile and transitory state of all beauty. Naturally, the students looked at me a bit askance: what kind of definition was *that*? When I told them that I was thinking of the Japanese word "aware," and not the English word "aware," they mock-protested. How, they asked, could they be expected to know the meaning of a word from a language they did not speak. And then, to their everlasting credit, they proceeded to ask about any other Japanese words I might know, and to translate the principle of "aware" more fully.

It is to address this discrepancy—the gap between what students know of writing and what they will be *expected* to know—that justifies and enlivens *What Is Writing?* Immediately after the "aware" exercise, I asked the students to list all the possible kinds of writers and writing they could think of. From this list, we fashioned a set of real-world projects, and I paired the students to send them forth to bring back to the class real-world writers: playwrights, advertising executives, professional storytellers. Between the writers the students found via their own initiative and the writers who constantly visit all aspects of the university community (many of whom volunteer their time to speak with the class), we began to determine the intellectual and pragmatic structures upon which the multiple worlds of writing depend. We examined ideas of expertise, ownership, art, and argument—and the ways each of these informs the other, and how the pervasiveness of writing depends upon its infinite variety.

I've been continually surprised at the intellectual daring of these Lloyd Hall students, not least when they summoned Lloyd Carr to explain the role of writing and speaking in his capacity as football coach and, how, despite his love of his job, he still enjoys wistful dreams of being an English teacher. Our academic worlds couldn't appear farther apart, but through the intensive awareness that *What Is Writing?* brings, I've come to appreciate exactly what he means.

## Callaway Prize Winner Addresses Contradiction and Conflicts of Community Service

George Cooper

His alias for the Callaway submission is Dylan Miles, masking his real-life identity as Nik Frank-Lehrer, a University of Michigan junior. He is on Alternative Spring Break in Minnesota, working with a Hmong population emigrated from the persecution of Laos to the prejudices of the United States. Frank-Lehrer's Callaway-winning essay is entitled, "Raising Stars, Raising Stripes."

Anticipating the experience, Nik writes, "I am constantly suspicious that nothing I study, nothing I know, and nothing I do with the rest of my life will ever, really, impact the life of another human being. No curing diseases. No stopping wars. . . . This week, I assure myself, will turn it around. Now I have Social Concern. I have Ambition and Independence. I have a Cell Phone. From here on, against all appearances, I am a grown-up."

Frank-Lehrer contrasts his being a grown-up—a 21-year-old adult—with Kou Yang, a man who would have been governor in his own country, but had been branded a national traitor. "Kou survived with his family and others like his in the country's jungle for two years, subsisting on grime and grubs with children in tow," Nik writes.

Eight years later, upon first meeting Kou in Minnesota, Nik writes, "He is sitting across a plastic snack table from me at Camp Snoopy, the indoor amusement park in the Twin Cities' Mall of America. My Christmas-gift cell phone vibrates freshly in my pocket—it's my girlfriend, calling from her spring break condo in Miami—but I click it forward to my voice mail. There is a time and a place."

A group of University of Michigan students is in Minnesota working with Hmong children, helping out as tutors. Working in the classroom, Nik writes that student Hue is, "too shy and soft-spoken to engage in conversation. It left me feeling a little tender just to watch him raise his hand in class. 'Raising' meant changing the angle of his arm, but not necessarily its height, and was usually accompanied by the quietest, 'I know!' that the teacher never once heard.

"Shy Hue in the classroom was much like the Hmong in America: a minority that no one kept their eyes open for, one too alien in our dog-eat-dog culture to be assertive. We were told when we signed up that one important function of our bond with the students was to demonstrate to their parents that trustworthy Americans really did exist in the country that had yet to accommodate them."

In class, they do some drawing. Nik makes friends. There are contradictions and chaos, temper tantrums, kids sleeping on floors, obstructive teachers, and negligent parents. There is poverty. “Here I was, fresh from the University of Michigan with a brand new cell phone in my pocket, having grown up in pleasure and excess, asking myself dumbly, ‘Why aren’t these kids growing up like I grew up?’”

Two Michigan students visit Soo’s home at his request. They assume Soo has informed his parents. They horse around and wrestle. They are approached by the eldest daughter who asks, “My mother and father wish to know . . . what you are doing here?” The two Michigan students disengage from their shenanigans. They set the giggling youngsters down. “It’s a program from school.”

Nik writes, “We *were* two strange young men, and we *had* been roughhousing with their children for 10 minutes before being investigated. I recall, as we explained ourselves to the parents, little Hue’s meek hand-raising in class. . . .Can this entire people be expected to charge, waving shotguns, at strangers in their homes with the violent defensiveness of us home-fried Americans? Of course not.”

The Michigan students are accepted at Soo’s home. They play some more. Nik writes, “I am not an adult, I realize as playtime ends. I’ve spent this entire week in shock at how much these children and their families have gone through, yet I could barely even respond to it without babbling clumsily. Rather than discouraged, though, I feel grateful.”

Nik concludes, “As we leave Soo’s house, the two-year-old on my leg looks up at me and repeats the same word he’s been babbling at me all afternoon. I turn to his older sister, confused, and ask her to translate. ‘What is he calling me?’ I ask her. She listens momentarily as the boy shrieks again for my attention, and then she smiles.

“‘America,’ she laughs at me. ‘He’s calling you America.’”

## Novice Writers Lauren Caldwell

In Spring 2003, nine colleagues and I attended the first Sweetland Dissertation Institute, a workshop for graduate students in the thick of the dissertation-writing process. The following fall, I participated in the Sweetland Writing Center Fellows Seminar, which, among other things, provides training for advanced graduate students who teach their own writing-intensive seminars to first-year undergraduates. Both experiences were positive and formative, which is no surprise. More un-

expected was the way the two programs fed into each other to change how I viewed myself as a scholar and teacher.

The Sweetland Dissertation Institute, with its emphasis on peer workshops, confirmed the centrality of writing to the graduate student experience. At the same time, it exposed our reluctance, as new researchers, to discuss issues of composition. We were much more comfortable commenting on the content of a colleague’s chapter than recommending improvements in style, tone, or organization. Our meetings were productive, but we never completely overcame our discomfort with critiquing one another’s writing.

One thing we lacked was a vocabulary for talking about ourselves as writers, not just as scholars. In particular, we might have profited by employing the concept of the “novice writer,” to which I was introduced in the Sweetland Fellows Seminar. Acknowledging that dissertators are novice writers is more important than it may first appear. For many graduate students, to admit that writing the dissertation is difficult—not simply stressful—is almost shameful. Yet, as I have found, an astute reader who comments on the written composition is an enormous asset. Louis Cicciarelli, the Sweetland instructor who ran the Dissertation Institute, helped me untangle knotty pieces of prose and reconfigure sections of chapters, complementing the content-centered assistance my dissertation committee provided.

Perhaps less predictably, the notion of the novice writer can help Graduate Student Instructors bridge the gap between themselves and their students, since it underscores that writing is a constant challenge for all writers. Last winter, as my students were trying to ascend from high-school essays to college-level argumentation, I attempted for the first time to tighten up and smooth out the very extended argument in my dissertation. Drawing this parallel made it easier to identify with my students’ efforts. And when they understood that I considered them scholars-in-training, they pushed themselves harder.

Sweetland’s Dissertation Institute has been perceived as designed for a subset of dissertators who are stalled in their writing process. Yet this is a narrow way to view graduate students’ experiences. I do not know a student who has not felt overwhelmed by the writing process; no one is born knowing how to write a dissertation. The struggle is a natural, even desirable, stage of development, and is preparation for our lifelong roles as researchers and teachers. Since writing is a cornerstone of an academic career, we should not be afraid to admit its new challenges. I encourage all my fellow novice writers to seek out and gauge the benefit of writing consultations for themselves.



gayle morris  
**sweetland writing center**  
university of michigan

## **Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: A Cross-Disciplinary Conference on Writing**

September 23-25, 2005

The Sweetland Writing Center will hold a national conference to explore the inter-related issues of originality, imitation, and plagiarism for students, scholars, professional writers, and readers. This conference will draw local and national attention to issues of concern to educators, students, and the general public, namely the widespread perception that much written work for academic purposes and general consumption is no longer original, but is imitative or plagiarized. We will address issues of copyright and ownership of original work, the appropriate dissemination of innovative ideas, and the authority and role of the writer/author. In recent years, we have been treated to several high-profile cases of scientists, historians, journalists, and politicians stealing material from their peers or inventing facts to fit a thesis. Newspapers, radio, and television regularly lament the misuse of the Internet. How do scholars and students separate their own ideas from the cacophony of intellectual information within a specialized field, the media, and the Internet?

We have invited major figures in the fields of higher education, journalism, composition studies, copyright law, and creative writing. Plenaries will focus on the role of higher education in promoting the free exchange of information, while also guarding intellectual standards. Speakers will address the ethical and practical issues that complicate our contemporary notions of the writer and originality. Specialists in composition studies, especially in writing centers, are often expected to play a pivotal role in enforcing campus and community standards of authorial honesty. Composition specialists and creative writers will address both theoretical and practical issues for the teaching of writing, in which issues of originality, copying, and plagiarism are especially fraught for students.

At Sweetland, we see this confusing ferment of ideas as an opportunity to rethink the place of writing in education and learning. Our conference will be a timely intervention in national debates about what constitutes original or plagiarized writing. Postmodernists have played with, superimposed, and altered existing icons, clichés, and tropes in art and literature. Leading MFA programs, including our own, feature courses in imitation, arguing that the best way to develop one's creative voice is to imitate consciously the work of established and venerated authors, such as William Faulkner and Earnest Hemingway. Medieval and Renaissance scholars remind us that the principle of imitatio—imitating classical authors—was a well-established and respected style of writing. Only in the eighteenth century did the written word become a unique form of intellectual property, to be protected in order to insure the livelihood of the individual author. Ever since, Anglo-American copyright law has upheld two contradictory principles, the need to protect a work and the freedom to disseminate its content. The legal distinction between free ideas and protected words still stands. In recent years, however, numerous institutions, including the Internet, have complicated these traditional rights. The troubling issues of what constitutes originality, imitation, and plagiarism among students are writ large in our society.

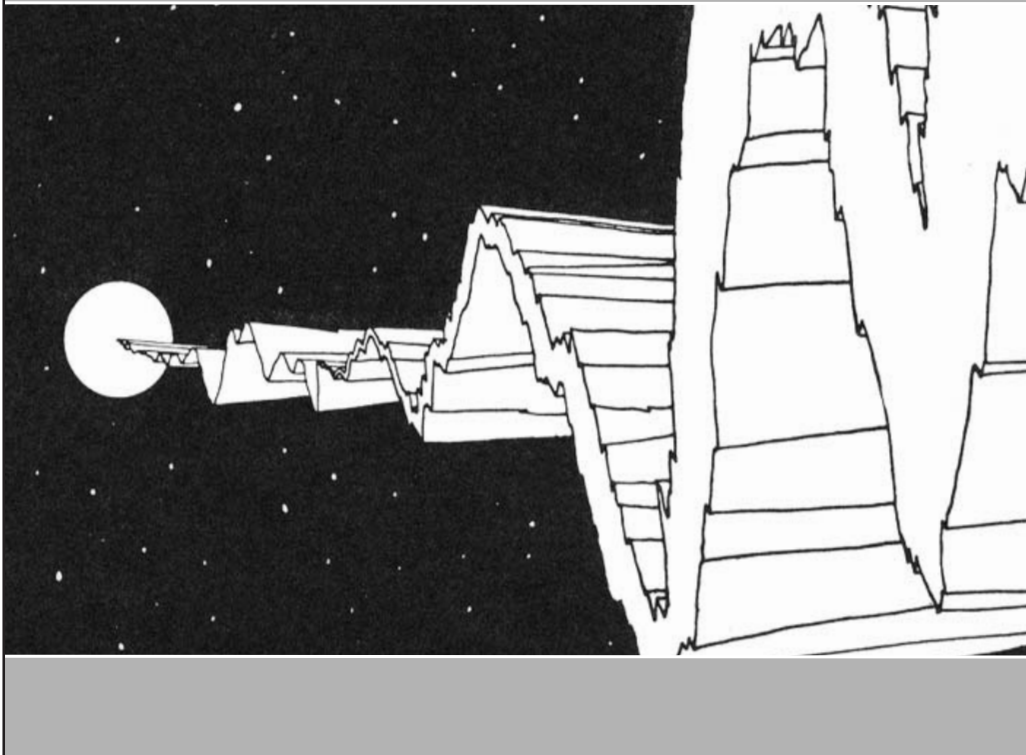
# ORIGINALITY IMITATION PLAGIARISM

The Sweetland Writing Center at the University of Michigan will hold a national conference to explore the inter-related issues of originality, imitation, and plagiarism for students, scholars, professional writers, and readers.

**University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**  
**September 23-25, 2005**

**For more information or to contact us:**  
**[www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/conference](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/conference)**  
**or [confSWC@umich.edu](mailto:confSWC@umich.edu)**

 at the heart of  
**sweetland writing center**  
university of michigan



## A New View of Pedagogy

Keith Pecor

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and my research focuses on animal behavior, with an emphasis on the use of chemical signals in animal communication. The Sweetland Writing Center Fellows Seminar was an excellent opportunity to learn more about pedagogy, as well as to experience a different view of academia. Now, after the semester's conclusion, I find myself contemplating the ideas from the seminar on a daily basis. This continued reflection is partially due to my new role as an English 125 instructor and partially because the seminar dramatically improved my writing.

The greatest benefit of the seminar is a renewed appreciation for the university as a whole. Undergraduates experience the breadth of the university, whereas graduate students experience a single department and has an in-depth view of his or her chosen field. In the seminar, interacting with graduate students and faculty from across campus opened my eyes to a different academic culture than what I was accustomed to. Furthermore, it gave me a richer appreciation for our diverse community. Hearing the approaches to pedagogy taken by faculty in the humanities and social sciences helped me see my department and teaching strategies in a new light.

In addition to gaining a new appreciation for the university, the ideas presented in the seminar helped me attain a more sophisticated teaching philosophy. Prior to the seminar, I felt comfortable with my philosophy as it related to general principles of education and the specific content I engaged in as a Graduate Student Instructor in Biology courses. I still have that confidence, but my approach to student writing and its uses in the learning process—regardless of a student's major—is now more developed. I previously taught a class with an emphasis on discipline-specific composition, but teaching general composition to first-year students has required a far greater attention to the importance and application of writing skills. My transition from discipline-specific thinking to general thinking was aided tremendously by Princeton University professor Judith Swan's visit to the Seminar. Dr. Swan is a biologist, and she also has an extensive background in composition. Discussion with her in the seminar and over dinner were the most intellectually stimulating experiences of the semester for me.

I taught Introductory Biology for the eighth time this past fall and, as a result of the Sweetland Seminar and interactions with Dr. Swan, my approach to the class

changed. I now have a better understanding of both the place of composition in that class as well as more effective ways to teach writing to new Biology students.

At the time I drafted this piece, I was midway through my semester teaching College Writing, and my enthusiasm for teaching composition was undiminished by the demands of the position. The students improved their confidence and ability as writers at an exponential rate, which was very rewarding.

I rank my experience as a Sweetland Fellow very highly among the opportunities I have enjoyed as a graduate student at Michigan. Not only have I acquired new pedagogical skills, but my thinking about my own writing has become more sophisticated. My grant and dissertation writing benefited from the clarity of thought about writing I gained from the Sweetland Seminar, and these ideas will undoubtedly continue to help me throughout my academic career.

Dr. Judith Swan:  
From Scientist to Writing Guru  
Kathryn W. Tosney  
Professor of Cellular, Molecular, and Developmental Biology

Dr. Judith Swan began her transition from scientist-researcher to writing educator when she was writing her thesis in Biochemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She found that research and writing were intimately connected. As she stated during a recent interview, "The act of writing was changing me, and the way I was thinking." She found that writing was an integral part of doing science. As she wrote, she discovered new possibilities, new questions, that fed directly into new experiments and new conceptualizations. She found that writing-as-thinking was a trackless wilderness in science, an excellent thing, but without helpful guides. In the intervening years, she has become that guide.

In Swan's transition, serendipity played a part. She was exposed to an emerging psychology of writing that focused on reader-oriented prose, and she developed a writing strategy based on those insights. She describes this strategy in her influential paper, "The Science of Scientific Writing," *American Scientist* (1990) 78:550-558. This paper examines prose by looking at what readers need to know. It defines where readers expect context (old information), new information, and emphasis. Once authors are aware of what readers need and expect, Swan explains, they can manipulate their writing to supply context in the places where readers customarily expect to find it. They can place the information they wish to emphasize in those positions



Dr. Judith Swan  
Princeton Writing Program

that readers automatically stress. This strategy enhances clarity and increases the probability that authors and readers will agree on what is important, and goes beyond grammar in a structurally based mechanism of linguistic analysis that allowed Swan to integrate two perspectives, science and writing.

A second serendipitous element cemented the importance of reader-oriented writing for Swan. She took an intensive “Methods in Logic” graduate course that aimed to take scientific literature apart. Its goal was to produce scientists who actively read literature. Students in the course developed an ability to ferret out what they needed to know, however opaquely the information was expressed. The difficulty was not simply the scientific jargon. Every field, from knitting to quantum mechanics, has its own jargon. The difficulty was in deciphering the context and decoding the salient points, even when these were obscured by the structure of the writing. Students had to learn to read actively and to trust themselves as readers.

A third element was the realization that scientific culture is evidence-based, and thus depends critically on argument. The mental culture of scientists is unusually flexible. Scientists are not immune to persuasion. They have, as Swan put it, “a culture that allows them to accept changing stances.” In the face of evidence, scientists can and do change their minds. The converse is that dogmatic statements that stand alone lack weight. Students can make didactic statements, but without evidence, the statements are unacceptable. Consequently, scientific writing *argues*. Virtually everything a scientist writes, from a grant proposal to a journal article, is an argument. Scientists’ success is measured by how effectively they convince their read-

ers. It is, therefore, crucial to supply what readers need in order to understand each argument.

Swan identifies four major tools to change writing from a culture oriented on the writer to one oriented on the reader. The first tool is to promote critical reading. Critical reading requires a shift from the stance that there is a single answer, a single way of reading a sentence. Instead, readers must learn to think of themselves as experts in their ability to read, trusting themselves and willing to ask for what they need.

The second tool is to seek out readers and listen to them. As Swan says, “The reviewer of your proposal is always right.” If the reviewers misunderstood your writing, it is not their fault. It is yours. Your writing was not clear or convincing. It needs to be changed. Paying attention to your readers can show you what to change.

The third tool is to discard the notion that there is a single standard of good writing. For instance, in using passive or active tense, there is no external authoritative stance. Active voice is not always best. Passive tense is appropriate when agency is not the issue, for instance, when writing the methods section of a paper. The topic is the procedures, not the people who ran them. The issue is not whether the writing is bad, but whether it communicates—and if what it communicates is what you want to convey.

The final tool, vital for those of us who teach writing, is to articulate rubrics for grading. What are you asking your students to do? Define the criteria by the skills you teach, which is not to polish their grammar, but to polish their communication. Supply feedback explaining what happened in a submitted paper, how it led to a particular grade, and what strategies the student writer might use to improve communication. The goal is to increase your consistency and helpfulness.

Swan concluded her interview with a philosophical statement: “The meaning of your life’s work is in how many other people’s lives you have changed.” Swan’s work has significantly altered writing in the sciences and the scientists who write it, as my personal history as a practicing scientist will attest. During my scientific training, I had the misfortune to work with graduate and postdoctoral mentors who wrote beautifully. They would sit down and write a paper in one sitting, without anxiety, missteps, or revision. Yet, when I would hand them a draft of my paper, they would say, “Kathryn, it’s not clear.” I would ask, “But WHY isn’t it clear?” They couldn’t tell me. Those who naturally write beautifully are no help to those of us who lack their natural facility. To remedy my writing problems, I sought help by studying grammar, and discovered that understanding grammar is little help. A sentence can be grammatically perfect and completely incomprehensible. However, Swan’s 1990 paper identified strategies that



worked. It identified strategies that could be *taught*, as she has taught them across the country, at universities, businesses, and professional meetings, and as I have taught them in my courses. As students and colleagues come to me for help with their writing, I offer them her paper with the fervor of a religious convert: "Read this!"

## Responding to ESL Writers: Implications for Peer Tutor Training

Matthew Kelley

Not too long ago, as a graduate student teaching my first English as a Second Language (ESL) writing course, I came across a paper mysteriously titled "Traps of Goods." Though it sounded like some unfortunate economics term, there was nothing in the paper that explicated this mysterious title. My frustration at this strange, unexplained "Traps of Goods" and my own uncertainty at how to "mark" student writing led me to avoid commenting on the paper for several days. When, in a flood of good-intentioned response several days later, I wrote the word "ambiguous" just above the mystical title. Unfortunately but inevitably later in the term, I received the student's revision. The new title of the paper was "Ambiguous Traps of Goods."

The lesson I learned is that students often interpret our written comments, particularly in-text annotations like this one, as prescription rather than as options or prompts. Much ESL pedagogy tells us that for ESL students who often look upon grammatical and conventional accuracy with more urgency than do our native speakers, our comments come to represent not only course requirements but also a model of academic writing as well as an "English standard."

The implications of this perception in a tutoring context are many. For years, a central debate in tutoring pedagogy has centered on the virtues of "minimalist" tutoring (Brooks 1995) that privilege a more student-centered, nondirective approach in a tutoring session, as opposed to the inevitability and necessity of a directive approach (Shamoon and Burns 1995) given the hierarchical, discipline-specific nature of university writing.

In my SWC 300 Peer Tutor Training Seminar, students observe and conduct writing workshop sessions. In the course of the observations, these prospective tutors analyze ongoing OWL (online writing and learning) sessions in which students submit their papers online and, in turn, tutors respond to them online. Last term a number of submissions from Second Language students exposed my SWC 300 students' anxieties and concerns about tutoring ESL students for

whom the typical strategies for student involvement (such as reading aloud and questioning) might seem meaningless or, at the very least, a compromise of the tutor's authority. In addition, students expressed anxiety about the "Ambiguous Traps of Goods" scenario, in which well-meaning comments or suggestions in a workshop session might be interpreted as a set of prescriptions rather than options. My students observed otherwise successful tutorials in which a tutee copied the tutor's language verbatim into the margins or even into the text of the paper, scenarios that compromised even the most student-centered approaches.

In Fall 2004, Judy Dyer, from the English Language Institute (ELI), joined Sweetland's Writing Workshop. Several of my students, eager to observe an ESL session, were able to see her at work over the course of their observations, and Judy and I set up an informal exchange whereby my tutors met with her ELI 120 students as they were working on the semester's final projects. My students reported that the sessions with the ESL students prompted them to think more fully about the importance of modeling the same clarity, precision, engagement, and support in their tutoring that we expect from students when they write papers. As the ESL students asked the tutors to rephrase a piece of advice or mulled over the meaning of a word my students mentioned perhaps offhand, my students learned that the ESL sessions were an invaluable means of identifying our tendencies toward editing and prescription. These sessions remind us that far from being passive receptors of our advice, ESL students give us the opportunity to respond in an engaged, fresh and more thoughtful fashion than our often jaded arsenal of "tutorspeak" produces.

## Diversity amongst "ESL" Writers

Judy Dyer

*I communicated with my sisters at home only through English in the midst of mom yelling, "Speak Korean! Are you Korean?"*

—Jane Kim (quoted in Chiang and Schmida 1999)

If one thing has become increasingly apparent in my last six years of teaching writing to undergraduates at the University of Michigan, it is that students' linguistic identities are too complex and diverse to be captured by any one of the terms frequently used to describe them—Speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL), non-native speakers of English, international students, Generation 1.5—generally meant to describe

someone who linguistically falls short of monolingual English speakers.

In both Sweetland's Writing Workshop and the English Language Institute's Writing Clinic, as well as in the undergraduate writing class (ELI 120) taught at ELI, I have found the breadth of my students' language experiences to be broad, resulting in a heterogeneous classroom population and a wide range of writing issues. Far from viewing all these students as having the same problems, I have come to think of their writing as a unique reflection of who they are in terms of their relationships to English.

As a preliminary to describing several of these writing issues, let me first outline some of the identities found in the classroom that will illustrate the heterogeneity. Many students sound more like native speakers of American English than I do (I'm British), but are placed in an ESL writing class because of literacy issues. Ironically, while thus being labeled ESL students, they feel more comfortable conversing in English than in their so-called "first" language—their heritage language or the native language of their parents. At the same time, these students often feel culturally linked to their heritage-language identity through culture. Their identity as *speakers* of English is rarely contested; it is their literacy in English that is the issue. On the other hand, in the same class there also are likely to be students who have studied English only in their home country before coming to the US, but who are fairly literate in that first language. Because of this first language literacy their English writing may be markedly different from the first student I described. Our task as writing instructors is to recognize these differences and not to be blinded by incorrect grammar or faulty syntax into thinking that these students have the same writing issues. Giving extra grammar exercises rarely offers any help at this stage in their language learning or careers as writers.

Below I list various issues that I have observed in my teaching and writing workshop sessions:

1. Incorrect grammar (wrong verb tenses, use of articles or lack thereof, incorrect sequencing of verb tenses, very short sentences or very long garden-path type sentences with multiple embedded clauses);
2. Problematic organization of information (no clear structure to the essay, thesis appears in the last paragraph);
3. Few rhetorical signals indicating importance of information or how information is linked to prior and subsequent information;
4. Written English that sounds like spoken English (informal vocabulary, lack of ability to produce academic register);

5. Lack of deep analysis of content (this and the following are issues for American students also); and
6. Little knowledge of principles of citation or of how to integrate others' work into their own writing.

Here, due to limitations of space, I can do no more than suggest some of the different causes and possible remedies for one of these, and since incorrect grammar seems to be mentioned most frequently, let us look at that.

#### Incorrect grammar

Possible cause #1: Influence of first language on the grammar of English (for example, a language such as Chinese has fewer inflectional morphemes for verb tense).

Possible remedy: Review particular sentences with the student to explain when to use certain tenses. Provide generalizations, e.g., use the present tense when referring to what someone has written in an article (the author states...).

Possible cause #2: Sometimes faulty grammar may indicate that the student is having difficulty either understanding or explaining the content, maybe because it is new knowledge and/or new language.

Possible remedy: Check comprehension through writing exercises such as summarizing. Allow time for them to grasp the new concepts and the language. Give (oral and written) practice in talking and writing about the concept.

Possible cause #3: Sometimes grammatical mistakes are the result of misheard pronunciation, e.g., some grammatical items are frequently unstressed (*the*, *a*) and may not be heard by students. Similarly with past tense morphemes, e.g., *laughed* (the /t/ at the end) or the reduced auxiliary verb in *I've* may not be heard.

Possible remedy: Awareness-raising exercises such as dictation with plenty of unstressed articles and morphemes.

Interestingly, two of these three possible causes of incorrect grammar may not have their roots in grammar but in other aspects of language or language learning. I am sure, you, like me, may have noticed that a student has a better grasp of grammar in the essay requiring a self introduction, than in an essay describing a Yoruba artifact or critiquing a psychology experiment.

In this short discussion I hope that I have managed to convey the heterogeneous nature of the students so often labeled ESL, and the diversity and complexity of their relationships with the English language. Their English texts tell the stories of those relationships, and we as writing instructors must be sensitive to the differences.