
wordworks

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From the editor
*Lib Thatcher

My mind is a blank. I have six chapters to read for class. My checkbook needs balancing. My floor needs vacuuming. My daughter needs clothes. And I need a vacation! But I'm not complaining. Far be it from me to pour out my problems in an essay. No, I will suffer in silence. In short, I'm suffering from mid-quarter-itis.

Sound familiar? The pattern is regular enough: on the first day of class, the parking lot is full, everyone answers to the roll, and we are all eager to get one step closer to graduation. By mid-quarter, however, it becomes easier to find a parking space, the chairs are beginning to empty, and we begin to wonder. "What good is a diploma, anyway?"

The same trend affects the Writing Center. Students tend to come in when they are feeling stressed and under pressure: "I have twenty minutes to fix this and turn it in" is commonly heard this time of the quarter.

How do we, as writing assistants, alleviate mid-quarter stress? The Hope Healthletter (Hope Heart Institute) offers this advice:

The next time you think you have a problem, try telling yourself that you have an "opportunity" or a "challenge" instead. Redefining the situation as an

opportunity or a challenge can reduce a whole lot of stress, and allow you to

come up with a creative solution.

The article also offers this advice as a stress reducer for negotiators:

If you sit on the same side of the table as your opponent [tutee], you'll significantly undermine the me-against-you approach to negotiating

[assisting], and you'll get a feeling of cooperation from the start. So says Gerard Nierenberg, president of the Negotiation Institute. (Oct. 89)

While we aren't negotiators (or maybe we are: mediators between students and their papers), the suggestions given confirm what we have always been taught to do in the Writing Center: to sit beside the student.

Even though these two ideas are simple, they offer good advice on how to reduce stress, both for ourselves and for our tutees.

Meanwhile, my checkbook still needs to be balanced, and my daughter is still in her pajamas. But I will come up with a "creative solution" to my "challenges." I will endure and learn from my "opportunities." Quietly.

Women must have recipes
For the act of love.
They require it simmered
A long time with seasonings
Before it may be brought
To the table, properly set.

They have never understood
The simpler palates of men,
Who with equal savor
Can love on the hoods of cars,
In canoes, during air raids.
In barrels going over Niagara Falls,
In the library stacks
Near the letters of Keats.

Women in such settings
Doubt the sincerity
Of hunger.

•Dr. Robert S. Mikkelsen
Professor of English, W. S. C.

Legs Long Enough
An Interview with William Stafford
***Neil Hollands, Writing Assistant**

In the middle of blustery February, Ogden was visited by a warm calmness named William Stafford. Now 75, Stafford is one of our most distinguished American poets, having won Guggenheim Fellowships, the Book Critics Award, and the National Book Award for poetry, as well as serving as poetry consultant for the Library of Congress. Still, when listening to him, one gets the feeling that Stafford views all of his honors as nothing more than another pleasant memory, like listening to his children or taking a morning walk. After hearing him read, along with Brett Hart I had the lucky chance to talk with Stafford about his poetry and the writing process:

Neil Hollands: The first thing that I am struck by in hearing you is that you have such an inner calm and optimism about your writing. Are there any risks for you in writing?

William Stafford: I think that your impression is valid. I'd like to think it is. Whatever calm there is comes from a feeling I have that writing is okay to do. We all should forgive ourselves and each other for talk, and writing back and forth. It's an essential part of something we cherish—our sociability in a free country—interchange. Part of writing, or any of the arts, is a realization that sometimes what you do will meet appreciation and sometimes not, but the person doing it has a sustained faith in the prevalent productivity of the activity. So, I just keep writing. It's not necessarily having the overwhelming conviction that everything I've written is going to be good, but whatever it is it's okay. It's what's given to me at the time.

NH: What would you say to all the other people who have a harder time feeling that way?

WS: They are trying to be someone they're not. They're not able to accept the dailiness of their own experience as potential for admirable experience. They are feeling they have to get out of themselves and become someone else, or follow a pattern, or find the national trend, or please an editor, whereas what they really have to do is get in synch with their own capabilities in the present: accept the now part of experience. Later, they can disown it or erase it, or have another thought, but what's given to you

now is worth attention. It's up to all of us to write those punk poems. Go ahead, write them! Write those bad things that are occurring to you, as shabby as they are (laughs).

Brett Hart: What is a poet? Is it a talent? You mentioned something about what we have in each of us, and not to give it away. Are each of us poets?

WS: I have this feeling, yes. I don't feel it's even controversial, though apparently it is to others. A poet is just someone who lends sustained attention to this process of allowing experience to spill over into language as it comes along. Anyone can do it. That's not the same as saying everyone can turn out a product that everyone will like, or even anyone will like, but that's different. Learning how to put out a product that everyone will like is what you do when you're doing ads or presidential speeches or some of those other shameful things ... (laughs).

NH: I've read your essay where you talk about how writing isn't a process of handing the baton from poet to poet. You've talked about how your influences aren't just other writers. Who and what have influenced you outside of poetry?

WS: ... I have a feeling that all of us derive the bounce of life that goes into creating things from the total environment. The language that's spoken around us is the great source for writers—it's not another writer—it's the ocean of language that we all share in ... I would have to affirm that I get the most bounce from prose. I read a lot of prose. I don't have finicky appetites: I read everything ... It seems to me that the satisfaction we get out of reading is a satisfaction that comes from an active participation. It's like downhill skiing. You can't just stand there. You've got to respond to what's happening. And the kind of terrain, reading terrain, that gives me that downhill exhilaration are people like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard. Those things are just full of goodies, wonderful slopes, necessary jumps. Well, I'll quote Nietzsche just to give you a taste. He said "The best way through the mountains is from peak to peak, but it takes long legs." (laughter)

NH: I was struck by an interesting quote [from

continued on page 3

Writing the Australian Crawl. You said "What one has written is not to be defended or valued, but abandoned." What relation do you have to your poetry after it's done?

WS: I feel friendly. I feel that I'm with them. When people say "Oh I wrote that then, and it's bad ..." I don't think you should do that to your children or your poems ... I have this feeling that once you put something in the language, it's in that ocean, and that ocean belongs to everybody ... We use to have the feeling, "How should a word be used?" Well, the dictionary maker tells you what it's supposed to mean. That isn't right. What the dictionary maker tells you is what it means to other people. The dictionary maker doesn't decide, but finds out. I find out what my work means from other people ... In that sense, I abandon my poems or turn them over. This question feels as though it has a barb in it, but it doesn't very much. Mostly, we converge. That's why we use language. It's not adequate enough for our imagination, but it's the best we have. Students would come to me and say, "Oh you read my paper. I'm sure you didn't get the right idea." I notice something they don't notice, that is, they're telling me how bad the language is with language. That's all we have.

NH: You just talked about students. How does the academic writing process differ from the creative process? Or is there a difference?

WS: I don't feel there is a difference. I believe in distinctions, so I'm sure many people feel some kind of difference. I think it's from some kind of limited realization of what goes on in writing. You can make writing sound as if all you do is find an outline and then mechanically do the words to it. You know, the way you've learned from textbooks, handbooks, MLA style sheet, or whatever. But really, even the most pedestrian applying of words to an outline seems to me pretty creative. It's by little steps that aren't really drastic steps at all ... So when I was teaching writing, I didn't make any distinctions. I always tried to get as near to this feeling of letting yourself monitor what's occurring in your writing as I could.

NH: You've said that "other societies are more traditional and have a closer relation to sustained formulation in language." Are American alienated from poetic language right now?

WS: I don't think so ... They phrase their

activities in ways that make them seem that they are. People come out of church and say "Why aren't people reading poetry anymore?" They've just been in there drunk on poetry. They've been reciting back and forth, you know. responsive reading and so forth. For some reason, maybe it's schools that are doing this, and maybe our inferior feeling to England, the East, Rome, Greece, and way on back-we're way out here on the end and all we can do is follow the patterns that they set and all we can do is kind of tinker around ... I think we've felt inferior. We've felt success oriented. In schools, what they've really got to do is fit people into a job in space technology or whatever. You can have both; I think the best people do. For those of us who are caught in the machinery, it may seem that we have to conform to a degree that will get us a job. We don't have time for these important things. William Carlos Williams said something like "The values that poetry gives are essential for life and everyday people die for lack of them."

NH: One last question. Let's go back to the quote that you have us from Nietzsche ... Figuratively, how long are William Stafford's legs?

WS: ... I remember a situation where I was reading at the Squaw Valley Writing Conference. They were practicing for the Olympics there. We had a day off from the writers' conference. I took my volume of Nietzsche. ... I climbed up a mountain. I was sitting in the shade of a pine tree reading, and it just seemed so funny to me. I looked around to make sure nobody was seeing a person laughing and reading a book while sitting up on a mountain where important things were going on like the Olympics. I had a feeling of being able to accompany Nietzsche. I mean, my legs were that long. That was a great feeling. I didn't feel that my legs were longer than other people's. just that I had learned the exhilaration it is possible to have ... I guess I will end by saying this. I am a good reader. I just have to face up to that. Some people, apparently, for all sorts of honorable reasons, aren't. I've never felt any special effort ... Be kind (laughter).

Thank you, William Stafford, for showing us how warm writing can be.

Welcome to our new Writing Assistants:

**Brett Hart
Mike Gooch**

**Dan Cooper
Carolyn Durham**

WHAT WORKS FOR ME

This month we are implementing a new column entitled "What Works For Me." In an attempt to gain from each other's experiences, we will be asking students and professors to share what writing or tutoring methods work for them. Diane Kulkarni starts us off with "Freewriting."

Freewriting: Revitalizing Life Experiences •Diane Kulkarni, Coordinator W. S. C. Writing Center

The poet William Stafford said that "a writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them."

Stafford gets up early in the morning before the busy-ness and demands of the day in order to wait for fresh thoughts. That appeals to me. I'm a very early riser, and I do it because that's the best time of the day for my writing. Trying to come up with something creative in the afternoon or evening is not a pleasant activity; every word has to be pried out of a deep abyss. But until I started practicing freewriting on a consistent basis, I didn't really **know** what Stafford meant by a "process" bringing "new things" into being.

One Sunday afternoon in 1988, a moment of illumination honestly changed my life. In my mind's eye, I saw my total life experience mesh into a perfect synthesis with the **process of writing** at the heart of the picture.

For the past twenty-five years I had been freewriting for study, in journals and letters and as a method of thinking through problems. Writing had effectively helped me to participate in my own life.

Excited by the sudden light bulb effect, another thought came thundering into my memory as if it had been waiting for just the right moment—something about being transformed through mind renewal.

Instinctively, I made a decision: I would continue to freewrite to know and understand, to find answers, and to see myself in a clearer, more realistic way. I would write to get through the muck of self-pity, confusion and extraneous thoughts to the heart of an idea. Writing

everything out much like a stream of consciousness works so much better that trying to write a perfect draft the first time. That's a fact.

In all, writing is my way of discovering who I am and where I am going, how I'm handling the traffic patterns in my life, and how I should approach the sensitive and wounded or the bristling and arrogant with wisdom.

What works for me is using the amazingly simple tool of freewriting to fulfill the prophesy of E. M. Forster. HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I THINK UNTIL I SEE WHAT I SAY? Give me thirty minutes at the computer and I'll be happy with what emerges.

All I need now is someone in the audience to say "AMEN!"

Tired of taking/giving essay exams in 400-level English courses? Students, take one of these alternative exams to your teachers and propose they implement this new and improved method testing. Teachers, feel free to use any of the three exams below in place of the traditional essay exam.

CREATIVE WRITING: Write the Great American Novel. Weaving the power and scope of Moby Dick, the humor and social insight of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and religious significance of any one of C. S. Lewis' novels, draft and revise a novel of epic proportions with innovative style and creative brilliance. No word processors, please. You have 50 minutes.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: Using the red telephone provided, start World War III. Then write a short description (2000 pages) of the socio-political, moral and ethical, and economic ramifications of your methodology and its results. Feel free to use the Little Brown Handbook.

MEDICAL RESEARCH: Using the test tube and Bunsen burner provided, create a universal drug that will cure cancer, heart disease, AIDS, and old age. In a monograph conforming to APA style, prove your results and justify your methodology and have them published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

•author unknown, Rick's College

To My Tutor

I went to the Writing Center today
To see what the tutor on duty would say.
My paper was bad, so
The teacher was mad
And I'd decided to throw that dumb paper
away!

My car engine broke down, so I'd taken the
bus.
My new shoes were devoured by our tiny
Dog, Gus.
But my paper was due,
And my nervousness grew.
(I'm ashamed to admit that I started to
cuss ...)

Just like a good neighbor, the tutor was
ready.
She could tell by my shivers I was in no
way steady.
She pulled out a chair
Said, "You can sit there,"
Then asked me my name and said, "Just
call me Betty!"

Her smiles and encouragement settled my
terrors.
I began to relax so we discussed writing
errors.
We read over my draft-
(She never once laughed!)
And I decided that tutors are not pitchfork
bearers.

We read and discussed, we discussed and
we read.
We organized, clarified, developed what I'd
said.
My paper was great.
Not a moment too late,
And I rush to flaunt my new knowledge to
Professor Me Fred.

Now my life is far better, I'm much more
successful,
Writing, to me, is not nearly so stressful.
My grades have been raised.
My mother's amazed,
And my college career's gone from messy
to blissful!

•Monica Blume, Writing Assistant

word workers

An Obituary

•Ronald Peterson
Writing Assistant

Ronald Peterson, renowned author, died at his home from remembering his college years. He was 101.

Yesterday, via holovision, millions of horrified fans watched their favorite author's remains blast off for Mars to be buried next to Ray Bradbury. The Insipid Mars cemetery is an historical site where many who fought The Battle for Viking were buried.

"I can't wait until my books become collector's items," said Leroy Longman, Peterson's publishing partner, as the tears welled in his eyes. "I looked forward to his next novel, The Weber Years, but now we'll never know what the name change did to his university."

Peterson, author of Ten Thousand Ways Not to Write and Tutoring: Bump on the Head, received his Bachelor's degree in English from Weber State University. He was born on April 24, 1966 and was banned from graduate school because of his short story, "Slime at the End of the Tunnel."

Peterson said he wanted to recognize the Writing Center at his university for giving him valuable experience. His earlier years were spent as a technical writer for the Kennedy Space Center. Some astronauts took pity on him and invited him to become the first technical writer to go to Mars. He achieved his goal as editor of several magazines on the Red Planet. He witnessed The Battle for Viking and published the all-time best-seller, Battle for Yesterday.

Surviving are his wife, Alison, and his two children, Will and Kath. Mrs Peterson said "I wanted to return to Earth, but our children' were born here. Who in the world would accept seven-foot thirteen and fourteen year-olds?" They are currently planning to return to Holland where Peterson's mother was born.

The resume workshop that was planned for February is going to be postponed until next quarter. We will make an announcement of the new time just as soon as it is scheduled. Watch for the announcement and plan on being there. Remember, your future is in your hands!

Writing Assistants

Luana Au: Business
Ken Barlow: Nursing/English
Monica Blume: Business/Linguistics
Dan Cooper: Communications/English
Carolyn Durham: Psychology/Social Work
Mike Gooch: General
Brett Hart: Communications/Spanish/English
JoAnn Holbrook: English/Secondary Ed
Neil Hollands: Political Science/History /
Communications/English

Sherr!Jensen: Economics/English
Diane Kulkarni: (1987 grad) English/Communi -
cations
Brent Mark: English/Communications
Ronald Peterson: English/Communications
Marion Pust: English/Earth Science/Sociology
Liesa Stockdale: English Ed/French
Elizabeth Thatcher: English/Theater
Sanna Thompson: Physical Education
Jeanie Wiecks: English

Statement of Purpose: The Writing Center
*Dr. John Schwiebert, Writing Center Director

Staffed by undergraduate students (writing assistants), the Writing Center is a unique place where W. S. C. students can receive feedback on their writing in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. The Center seeks to help all students, of all levels of writing ability, at any stage of the writing process. Trained writing assistants ask questions, listen, demonstrate techniques of invention, drafting, and revising, and provide an attentive and challenging audience for the student writer. Rather than “fixing” or proofreading papers, we model strategies so that students can help themselves to become better writers. In this way the Center fosters independent thinking, promotes a collaborative spirit, and improves intellectual growth and writing ability.

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Editor: Lib Thatcher
Design: Brett Hart, Liesa Stockdale
Writing Center Director: Dr. John Schwiebert
Writing Center Coordinator: Diane Kulkarni
Writing Center Hours: SS 042

8:30-2:30 Monday &

Thursday

8:30-4:30 Tuesday &

Wednesday

8:30-1:30 Friday

10:30-1:30 Saturday SS

040

Writing Center Phone: 626-6463

Comic Relief

Today you are you!
That is true-er than true!
There is no one alive
That is you-er than you!
Shout aloud, "I am glad to be what I am!"
Thank goodness I'm not a clam
or a ham
or a dusty old jar of gooseberry jam!
I am what I am!
What a great thing to be!
If I say so myself, happy every day to me!

•Dr. Suess

