

---

---

## Provocative Revision

*Toby Fulwiler*

---

I have been teaching writing for twenty-four years, first at the University of Wisconsin, later at Michigan Technological University, now at University of Vermont. During the past fifteen years, I have also worked closely with writing centers, watching them evolve from places which emphasize skills and drills to places which provide sophisticated and supportive counseling about the range of writing processes. While my education is far from complete, I have learned what you too must know: that teaching writing is teaching re-writing.

During that same time, however, I have also learned that for novice writers, learning to re-write is an alien activity that doesn't come easily. In fact, many college students, first year and graduate alike, assume that writing is essentially copying down what they've already been thinking—well, maybe with a little spell checking, editing a few awkward sentences, adding a transition or two, and throwing in (get it, throwing in) a few supportive examples.

In contrast, I am convinced that revision is the primary way that both thinking and writing evolve, mature, and improve. So now, when I teach writing, I no longer leave revision to chance, happenstance, or writer whimsy. I not only encourage it, I provoke it, emphasizing where, when, and how to do it. At the same time, I go to great lengths to make sure the writing remains each student's own.

The rest of this paper is concerned with the *where*, *when*, and *how* of

revision. I know how I, a classroom teacher who makes multiple-draft assignments, teach revision. What I am proposing to you who teach by tutoring is a set of provocative suggestions that will help your students learn to take revision seriously. These provocations are four: (1) limiting, (2) adding, (3) switching, and (4) transforming.

### 1. Limiting

Generalization is death to good writing. Limiting is the cure for generality. The problem with generalities is that most people already know the same ones you do. They get bored hearing them repeated again and again. Most people (a generality I make with some trepidation) who read newspapers and weekly news magazines or listen to TV or radio news know general things about famous people and current issues: that the President plays golf, that the crisis in the Middle East won't go away, that communism is on the run in Eastern Europe, as is the natural environment in the United States. What most people do not know about are the close-in details of these same specific issues—the telling details that make subjects come to life. One of the key qualities of writing that we might call “interesting” is that it teaches us something we did not already know—something beyond repetitious small-talk generality. Once a subject—be it a person, place, or problem—is explored through careful research and exposed through thoughtful writing, people are drawn in because they find themselves learning something new.

It's the details that teach. People are fascinated with the details of other people's lives and so biographies and autobiographies frequent the best seller lists—stories about the details of Presidents and rock stars as well as the assassins who shoot them. In like manner, people are fascinated with details of problems: classic examples include Rachel Carson's detailed exposé of environment-destroying pesticides in *Silent Spring*; Ralph Nader's in-depth investigation of Chevrolet's Corvair in *Unsafe at Any Speed*; and Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's minute revelations about the Watergate scandal in *All the President's Men*. Likewise it's the details in the research essays published in current periodicals, from *Rolling Stone* to *The New Yorker*, that make those magazines fascinating to read.

But writers have only so much time to write and space to work with, and so to spend more time and space including details means not including something else—which is where the concept of *limiting* helps out. Here are some specific suggestions for applying the principle of limiting to both narrative and research writing.

### *Limiting Time, Place, and Action*

In narrative and personal experience papers, a writer's first instinct is to try to tell or summarize the whole story. Such a generalized approach often gives the writer his or her first sense of what the story is about. As a teacher of first-year and advanced writing classes, I have come to expect—and accept as natural and useful—such overview writing on first drafts. Here, for example, are recent samples of fairly typical openings in first-draft narrative papers:

This is probably the most heroic event of my childhood. Everyone has their moments, but I believe that this episode is indeed commendable. . . .

Life, it definitely has its ups and downs. Every so often I realize just what stupid, mindless things I've caught myself doing to fill time. . . .

Last summer my mother and I flew to Ireland. . . . This action packed vacation turned out to be more than I could handle. From recalling old memories to falling in love, I helped discover a new side of myself. . . .

In everyday life there are so many things that frustrate us or make us upset that when we find something that makes us truly happy, we should take advantage of it at every opportunity. . . .

This is an experience I hope never to experience again in my lifetime. A friend of my parents committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. This hurt me a great deal because I was close to his children and I felt the pain they were feeling. . . .

These opening lines provide several clues to the problems typical of first-draft narrative writing: First, these writers generalize rather than particularize their experience, putting it into pre-packaged story categories (heroism, action-adventure). Second, they evaluate their experience too early, prejudging it, and telling readers in advance to react to it as stupid, frustrating, heroic, etc. Third, though you cannot see this from one paragraph fragment, many writers don't know in a first draft what their final-draft story will be. Consider, for example, this passage from a first-draft essay by Amanda, a first-year student from Scotland, writing a paper entitled "Waitressing":

For most of this summer I again worked on the farm, where I removed rotten, diseased potato shaws from a field all day. But I was in the sun all the time with a good bunch of people so it was quite

good fun. But again it was hard work. (As are most jobs!) My waitressing job was nothing to get excited about either. I signed up with an employment agency and got a waitressing job in Aberdeen, a city thirty miles north of our farm. It was only for one week, but I didn't mind—it was the first job that I had got myself and I felt totally independent.

Were Amanda to focus close, this single paragraph could divide into two entirely different directions, one focusing on her title topic, "Waitressing," and a second on "Farming"—in particular, working the potatoes fields. In fact, this passage reveals all three features typical of first-draft writing: over-generalization, prejudgment, and directional uncertainty. The problem with such writing is not that it is wrong or incorrect, but that it seldom makes good reading. The solution is usually in the writer's returning to the piece, re-seeing it, looking more closely, and finding through continued exploration, the story that wants or needs to come out.

Although such revision sometimes happens by itself, especially for writers who are engaged in their task, it does not happen for writers who are not engaged, who are going through the motions of completing somebody else's task—a common predicament in school writing. But there are some ways to begin to create engagement, even in assignments the writer does not yet own. For example, with Amanda's class, I asked all the students to write two new pages about an idea covered in one first-draft paragraph. I was asking them, in other words, to radically and forcibly narrow their focus. Here is a brief portion of Amanda's next draft:

[Harvesting potatoes] was always in October, so the weather was never very good. It either rained or was windy, often both. Some days it would be so cold that we would lie in between the drills of undug potatoes to protect ourselves from the wind.

In this draft, Amanda's details are helping her tell the story: Notice especially the detail about lying "in between the drills of undug potatoes" to keep out of the wind. That's a *telling detail*, the detail that only a writer who has actually dug potatoes on a cold October day is likely to know—the detail that begins to tell the real story for her and to which she ought to listen very closely. Amanda has a lot to say about digging potatoes.

After witnessing the life and energy in the potato field draft, I suggested that Amanda revise again, not about what *usually* occurred in October, but about what *particularly* occurred one day in October. (Aristotle gave this same advice three thousand years ago in his *Poetics* and Robert Pirsig two

decades ago in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.) I suggested, in other's words, that Amanda start her next draft by limiting the *time, place, and action* of her potato field story; her next draft begins this way:

Potatoes, mud, potatoes, mud, potatoes, that was all I saw in front of me. They moved from my right side to my left, at hip level. A conveyor belt never stopping. On and on and on.

I bounced and stumbled around as the potato harvester moved over the rough earth, digging the newly grown potatoes out of the ground, transporting them up a conveyor belt and pushing them out in front of me and three other ladies, two on either side of the belt.

The potatoes passed fast, a constant stream. My hands worked deftly, pulling out clods of dirt, rotten potatoes, old shaws, and anything else I found that wasn't a potato. They were sore, rubbed raw with the constant pressure of holding dirt. They were numb, partly from the work and partly from the cold. It was October, the ground was nearly frozen, the mud was hard and solid. Cold. Dirt had gotten into my yellow and yet brown rubber gloves, had wedged under my nails increasing my discomfort.

On and on the tractor pulled the harvester I was standing in, looming high above the dark rich earth, high above the potatoes. . . .

In this, her third draft, Amanda found her story and, in finding it, she found the telling particulars that put us beside her in the potato harvester. The specific suggestion to limit the time frame of her story made all the difference and, good writer though Amanda turned out to be, had the revision not been provoked, it wouldn't have happened.

### *Limiting Scope and Focus*

A similar limiting principle also holds true for more analytical or objective writing. *All* first drafts are first explorations and, as such, are likely to be overly generalized, obviously editorialized, and directionally incomplete. As in narrative, so in exposition, argument, and research, early drafts by inexperienced writers try to cover too much territory. It's understandable and predictable. When writers do not yet know a lot about a subject, they see it as if from a distance—and from a distance, even cities and mountains look small and manageable. Writers of such drafts then have the choice of staying far away, letting the generalities stand, and moving on to new subjects (and usually to mediocre papers) or moving in close, narrowing and sharpening the focus, and doing real writer's work—which means exploring the geography up close.

When I assign research projects to my students, I suggest—nay, require—that, in addition to library research, they find some local dimension of their topic, issue, or problem worth investigating. If, for example, they plan to research the abortion question, can they visit the local Planned Parenthood or a pregnancy clinic? If they plan to research something related to the environment, can they visit the local lake, landfill, or development to see the problem first hand?

I need to explain here that when I assign research projects in first-year writing classes, I require that the collecting of information be collaborative, and I strongly recommend the writing be collaborative as well. I do this for several reasons: first, to reduce the harassment of local institutions and people; second, to make the information-collecting process more rapid and efficient; and third, to model collaborative writing so often required of writers in the world outside of college. Though writing center tutors seldom determine whether research writing should be individual or collaborative, be assured that the revision techniques described here work in either situation.

In one first-year writing class, a group of five students researched the rise of *Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Company*—a local business developed by former University of Vermont students—and, in the following paragraph, described their visit to the original downtown store:

To the left of the stairs is a long, brown wooden bench with black metal legs that looks like it came straight from Central Park. Above it, on the wall, is a blown-up article from the *Rutland Herald*. To the right of the bench is a white, metal wastebasket, three feet high and two feet wide. On top of the wastebasket is a blue bucket that says "We are now recycling spoons." On every table in the room are napkin dispensers saying, "Save a tree, please take only one napkin."

On the one hand, this is a simple example of on-site descriptive writing meant to give readers the feel of the ice cream store. On the other hand, the recycling signs provide readers with their first clue that "environmental awareness" will be a major theme in the *Ben and Jerry's* research report. Further in the report the authors include library-based research information:

*Ben and Jerry's* is now looking for an alternative for their pint containers because they are made with a plastic coating for moisture resistance. This combination of materials makes the container non-biodegradable and difficult to recycle. According to their Annual Report, "As a result of this and other recycling efforts, we have reduced our solid waste volume by about 30% this year" (6).

The *Ben and Jerry's* paper concludes by arguing that profit making and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive—a thesis that emerged only gradually as the writers conducted their investigation and experimented with different drafts.

## 2. Adding

Perhaps the most obvious way to revise a paper is to add new information and more explanation. Most professional writers see adding and revising as synonymous. (They feel the same about subtracting and revising, but that's seldom the novice writer's problem.) However, few of the student writers who visit writing centers are likely to understand what addition could mean, unless an assignment has been made in multiple-draft stages, where proposals, outline, first and second drafts are required over a several week period. In any case, most students can profit by learning about addition, if they seek help early enough so there is time to do it. I want to illustrate this principle by continuing to emphasize local knowledge, this time recommending the addition of "dialogue"—people talking—to both personal experience and research writing.

### *Adding Dialogue*

Having people talk in a paper adds interest by limiting the focus to one or two people or a particular scene. In narrative or personal-experience writing, adding dialogue complements Aristotle's suggestion to limit time, place, and action, by putting actors on the sets. Adding talk allows readers to see and hear a story in a dramatic rather than narrative way, increasing reader involvement and interest.

To add talk to narrative writing requires remembering what was said sometime in the past or, more likely, re-creating what was probably or approximately said. Fiction is not allowed, but approximate re-creation is fair game for all experiential or autobiographical writing.

For example, in response to an assignment to draft a personal-experience paper, Karen described her whole basketball season in three pages, concluding with the team playing in the Massachusetts semi-final game in the Boston Garden:

We lost badly to Walpole in what turned out to be our final game. I sat on the bench most of the time. The coach did not even put me in until the fourth quarter when there were five minutes left and we were already twenty points behind.

For their second drafts, I asked these first-year writers to work dialogue into their narratives. Karen's second draft includes this scene:

"Girls, you have got to keep your heads in the game. Don't let them get you down. You've worked so hard all season. You are just as good as them, just look at our record, 18-2-0.

"Coach, they're killing us. They're making us look like fools, running right by us. We're down by twenty with eight minutes to go. It's hopeless."

"I don't want to hear anyone talk like that. You girls have worked too hard to get to this point and give up. You can't quit now."

Yeah, think of every sweat-dripping, physically-gruelling, suicide-sprinting, drill-conditioning Saturday morning practice this year. ("OK girls, for every missed foul shot it's one full suicide!") Oh, yes, I remember those practice sessions just fine.

"Tweet!"

Oh well, I missed another time out. It really doesn't matter, because he won't play me anyway.

Karen has added not only dialogue, but interior monologue as well, turning her paper from a summative to a dramatic telling. In this later version, we learn that Karen's dream changes from hoping her team will win the championship to sinking for herself a three-pointer in the Boston Garden—if only she can get into the game. Karen's second draft has expanded to six pages, but focuses only on the last eight minutes of the basketball game.

### *Adding Interviews*

Adding other voices also improves research writing—only now the adding requires actual on-site interviews in place of remembered or recreated dialogue. As a teacher of research, I've long been influenced by Ken Macrorie's notion of *I-Search Papers*, Eliot Wigginton's Foxfire stories—now up to twelve volumes—as well as the practices of investigative reporters who go places, ask questions, and record the results. Adding on-site information from experts increases a paper's credibility and readability at the same time.

One group of four first-year writing students investigated the role of the Ronald McDonald House in providing housing for out-of-town parents while their children stayed in hospitals. In Burlington, a Ronald McDonald House is located between downtown and the University of Vermont Medical Center, within walking distance of the UVM campus. A *Free Press* story turned up through library research reported the following information:

The McDonald's corporation actually provides about 5% of the total cost of getting the house started. The other 95% of the money comes from local businesses and special interest groups.

For their second draft, however, the group visited the house and interviewed parents, volunteer workers, and the director. In the following passage, Rosemary, the House director, explains the sources of funding:

"Our biggest problem is that people think we're supported by the McDonald's corporation. We have to get people to understand that anything we get from *McDonald's* is just from that particular franchise's generosity—and may be no more than is donated by other local merchants. *Martins, Hood, and Ben and Jerry's* provide much of the food. *McDonald's* is not obligated to give us anything. The only reason we use their name is because of its child appeal."

Which information, that found in the library or that revealed through live interview, is the most useful for research writers? Which is more interesting or memorable for readers? No need to choose, for in their final draft, the writers included both pieces of information, the one written with statistical authority, the other spoken with personal authority. Adding the voices of real live local experts also holds true for other kinds of objective writing as well: When writers let other voices help them argue, report, and evaluate, their arguments, reports, etc., are both more persuasive and exciting.

### 3. Switching

Switching involves telling the same story or reporting the same events as the previous draft, but doing so from a different perspective. For example, if a writer has been narrating in past tense, she switches to present. If a writer has been reporting research results in third person, he switches to first person for all or part of a draft. Switching a basic element, such as tense or point-of-view, mechanically provokes writers into re-seeing the content and often into reconceptualizing how to present it with maximum effect.

#### *Switching Point of View*

In narrative and personal experience writing, the most common first-draft perspective is first person: "Once upon a time I was playing basketball" or something like this. It's only natural that writers tell stories as they experienced them, through their own eyes, perspectives, voices. However, it sometimes helps writers to move deliberately outside of themselves and see themselves as someone else might. This can be done simply by switching

pronouns or, in a more complex way, by role-playing a third person. In the following example, Karen continues to tell her story of playing in the Massachusetts basketball semi-finals, but for this draft she adopts the perspective and voice of the play-by-play announcer:

Well folks, it looks as if Belmont has given up. Coach Gleason is preparing to send in his subs. It has been a rough game for Belmont. They stayed in it during the first quarter, but Walpole has run away with it since then. Down by twenty with only six minutes left, Belmont's first sub is now approaching the bench.

Megan Sullivan goes coast to coast and lays it in for two. She has sparked Walpole from the start.

The fans have livened up a bit, but oddly they aren't Walpole's fans, they're Belmont's. Cheers for someone named Karen are coming from the balcony. . . . Number eleven, Karen Kelly replaces Michelle Hayes.

By becoming the announcer, Karen adopts the cadences and spirit of an announcer in the broadcast booth, seeing and reporting the game as she imagines he actually did. Whether the announcer would have paid even this much attention to a substitute player entering in the last few minutes of the game is questionable—but that's not the point. By adding this voice, Karen added more details and a different perspective to her own story. In this draft, she realizes for the first time that her basketball enemies were actually three: the opposing team, the coach who refused to play her, and also her teammates who refused to give her the ball.

#### *Switching Voice*

Another switch that provides new perspective on exposition or argument is changing the voice that's doing the explaining or arguing. For example, changing the voice that delivers the information from objective third person to subjective first changes the nature of the information as well as the way it is received. Furthermore, if we use as examples the research essays commonly published in leading non-fiction journals, we notice that writers such as Joan Didion, John McPhee, and Jonathan Kozol commonly write in more than one voice—or in one voice, but varying tones, pitches, and registers. Why can't student research writing gain life by using similar techniques?

Here, for example, in the final draft of a thirty-page research report written by a group of first-year writers about pollution in Lake Champlain are four different voices:

[The Introduction is narrated by an out-of-town male student, who opens the report by meeting an in-town female student.]

Page 1: We both started to cycle and I followed her down a path near the lake: "I'm just amazed by the beauty of the water. It is great to see the islands out there in front of us. This is paradise," I said.

"Well, there are some problems with the lake. The sewage treatment plant," she paused and continued, "it's taken a lot of the beauty away."

"What do you mean?" I asked, and she proceeded to tell me this story. . . .

Page 3: How do you close down a public beach? You can't barricade the water, can you? *The Burlington Free Press* always used the word "Fecal Coliform," which basically means "shit." But the technological meaning is "a bacteria that indicates human waste." That almost sounds worse than shit!

Page 7: The sewage treatment plant of Burlington consists of a series of wells, pumps, and tanks. It is built to receive forty million gallons of waste water from the street drainage sewers of private and public bathrooms. During large rainstorms, the amount of water causes difficulties in the plant's ability to treat all the water which enters it.

Page 18: Some helpful hints for conserving water:

1. Take short showers. Get wet first, then turn the shower off, lather up, then turn the shower on and rinse off.
2. Don't keep the water running while you're brushing your teeth.
3. Keep a jug of drinking water cool in the refrigerator instead of running the tap water to get cold.

In these selected passages, the writers keep reader interest by sometimes switching to unexpected voices. At the same time, the report delivers the goods, describing and explaining the problem of lake pollution from personal and technological perspectives, and offering a range of solutions that include both technological fixes and changing personal behavior.

#### 4. Transforming

My final revision strategy is transforming, where a writer re-casts his or her piece into a form altogether different from what it has been. For example, if the piece has been drafted as something called a personal-experience paper, could it be recast as an exchange of letters or a diary? If a piece has been initially drafted as a formal research paper, could it be recast as a speculative or familiar essay? While these moves may seem, at best, superficial or, at worst, inappropriately playful for college-level work, I'd like to make the case that re-seeing writing in a different form is, at the same time, generative, liberating, and fun. Any time writers change around the way they present their ideas and information, they open up new conceptual possibilities in terms of both audience and purpose. In so doing, the staleness that sometimes accompanies routine acts of revision is relieved, and an excitement borne of experimentation takes over. Let me give you some final examples.

##### *Transforming Research Reports*

Research papers are all too often the reports that students hate to write and faculty hate to read. Do they need to be that way—problems for both student writers and faculty readers—with tutors caught in the middle? Some of the students whose work I've already examined have found interesting solutions to this problem.

Remember the Ronald McDonald House? In their final draft, these four writers collaborated to write a script for *60 Minutes*. The form is, of course, fiction, but the content is the hard information uncovered through extensive local research. Here are some of the parts of that script:

[The opening paragraph of the "Editor's Note" which served as a preface to the script.]

In this documentary we had a few problems with getting certain interviews and information. As the house is a refuge for parents in distress, our questions were often limited. We didn't want to pry.

[The opening paragraph of the script.]

SMITH: Hello, this is John Smith reporting for *60 Minutes*. Our topic this week is the Ronald McDonald House. Here I am in front of the House in Burlington, Vermont, but before I go inside, let me fill you in on the history of this and many other houses like it. . . .

[Within the script are scenes called a “Camera Eye” set in boldface type portraying the house from the objective view of the TV camera.]

Toward the back of the house, three cars and one camper are parked in an oval-shaped, gravel driveway. Up three steps onto a small porch are four black plastic chairs and a small coffee table. On top of a table is a black ashtray filled with crumpled cigarette butts.

[Smith learns about the house by going on a walking tour with a volunteer hostess named Robin; most of the information about the Ronald McDonald House comes from Robin’s answers to Smith’s questions.]

SMITH: Do you always cook dinner for the families?

ROBIN: Oh no. Most of the time they cook their own meals. However, if we have free time, we might make something for them. It’s really nice for them to come home to food on the stove.

In other words, rather than writing a report with no audience in mind, in the generic form of a term paper—which exists nowhere in the world outside of school—these writers posed the hypothetical problems faced by prime-time TV writers and imagined how they would solve them. Their simple idea of an “Editor’s Note” is itself an interesting move: Whereas in typical college research papers authors try to pretend they know everything, in this format the student writers felt they could be more candid about real problems they encountered and how it limited their resulting script.

Remember the group researching pollution in Lake Champlain? Their factual report is framed by a narrative story told by a fictional student; the report itself includes a tour of the waste treatment plant, interviews with merchants and shoppers to find out the level of public awareness of the problem, and statistical results from a self-designed survey given to Burlington residents about the pollution problem. The *Ben and Jerry’s* report resulted in a feature article aimed for publication in *The Burlington Free Press*, complete with illustrations. And another group in the same class reported on the plight of the homeless in downtown Burlington and wrote their final paper as a short (twenty-page) book with five chapters, one by each writer, the last one collaborative.

Tutors need to be especially careful here in what you advise. Many professors who assign research projects will have a specific idea of what such reports should look like, and tutors need to be careful to counsel the student in those directions. However, if a student’s professor is open to innovative approaches to the assignment, tutors might suggest that re-forming the final draft into something other than a term paper will be more creative, and fun to do, and interesting to read.

### *Reforming narrative*

Remember Amanda and the story of the potato field? It turns out that the “mud, potatoes, mud, potatoes” draft we looked at earlier described her most recent work on her father’s farm, after he had replaced manual labor with a mechanical harvester. In a subsequent draft, she wrote about the old days when up to sixty neighborhood people—men, women, children—had harvested the potatoes by hand:

1983. . . . I bent down to help Louise finish her stretch of newly uncovered potatoes. It was piece time. We had an hour to devour lunch before the next shift of potato picking began. . . . Martin, who worked alongside me and Louise, had uncovered a nest of field mice, so we saved them from being chopped up by the digger. They were so cute—I hope we got them all. . . .

In her final portfolio draft, Amanda’s paper most resembles a drama in two acts, with one act set in 1983 when field hands dug the potatoes, and including large portions of dialogue. The second act, separated by extra white space, is set in 1988 when she worked inside the potato-harvesting machine, and takes place largely as an internal monologue (“Potatoes, mud, potatoes, mud . . .”). However, at the very end she also included a new piece of writing, a coda, set off by extra white space, which explained her final understanding of the story she once thought was about waitressing:

1989. This year the potato harvester is still working, the same women on board, with the same bored expressions on their faces. Soon this job will probably not need anyone to work or help the machinery. Labour is an expense farmers cannot afford. There are no tattie holidays anymore, no extra pocket money for the children of the district. Change, technology, development is what they say it is. I say it is a loss of valuable experience in hard work and a loss of good times.

In her final draft, Karen our basketball player, provides three scenes, two occurring simultaneously and one sequentially: first, the play-by-play from

the announcer's point of view; second, her time on the bench and in the game; third, outside the locker room where she finds her father and they have a tearful celebratory conversation. Like Amanda, the third scene was generated only at the time of the final draft, adding a kind of closure to an eight-page story. (And, yes, Karen does make a three-point basket in the Boston Garden.)

It is interesting that Karen made extra copies of her basketball paper at Kinko's to give as Christmas presents to her family. But Amanda, who was equally proud of her potato story, did not send a copy home, so critical had she become of her father's decision to mechanize the harvesting of potatoes on the farm.

In the same class, John who had been trying to write an essay covering his eleven months in Ecuador, re-formed his essay into a series of cuts from a diary spaced throughout the year—a form that allowed him to show intermittent slices of his growth, but skip long deadly summaries. In like manner, Avy, trying to describe a long distance friendship over a four-year period, recreated periodic telephone conversations to show the passing of time.

Prior to attending college, many of these writers had been trained to write five-paragraph themes in Advanced Placement English classes; what they discovered as they shaped and reshaped their stories was how much fun it was to write in forms they invented for themselves. Again, tutors need to be cautious in their counsel, but when they discover writers locked into one tedious way of telling their stories, tutors can find out if there is any room in the assignments—or time in their lives—for experimentation and play.

These are the techniques that provoke serious revision in novice writers, showing them specific moves while allowing them to retain ownership of their papers. With a little thoughtful and cautious modification, they may also work for tutors.

---

**Toby Fulwiler** has directed the writing program at the University of Vermont since 1983. Before that he taught at Michigan Technological University and the University of Wisconsin where, in 1973, he also received his Ph.D. in American Literature. He currently teaches classes in first-year composition as well as upper division courses with titles such as "Personal Voice" and "Writing *The New Yorker*." He is author of *College Writing*, editor of *The Journal Book*, and co-editor of *Community of Voices*.

---

## Review of *The Writing Center: New Directions*

Jeanette Harris

---

Wallace, Ray and Jeanne Simpson, eds. *The Writing Center: New Directions*. (Garland Publishing, 1991), 295 pages.

Books about writing centers are few and far between. In the almost thirty years since writing centers first appeared on the academic scene, only a dozen or so books have been published that are devoted entirely to the subject. Not a lengthy list for a profession that has influenced the teaching of writing widely and profoundly.

Because writing center books are not published frequently, each one must bear the weight of great expectation and close scrutiny. Therefore, I began to read the most recent book-length publication, *The Writing Center: New Directions*, with some trepidation. Would this new writing center book (the only one, to my knowledge, published in 1991) fulfill my expectations? Would it live up to the promise of its name and provide "new directions"? Would it meet the diverse needs of writing center people, some of whom are novices while others are experienced, even jaded?

The answer to all of these questions is yes. Ray Wallace and Jeanne Simpson have put together a volume of eighteen essays by twenty-three authors that is a welcome and useful addition to the brief list of existing writing center scholarship. Like Muriel Harris' *Tutoring Writing* and Gary Olson's *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*, to which it is most similar, Wallace and Simpson's book is a collection of essays written by experienced writing center administrators and researchers. It is also like these