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Tutoring toward style

Ann White Mahoney

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TUTORING TOWARD STYLE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Ann White Mahoney
May 1989
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ABSTRACT

An interest in style has been a part of the study of rhetoric since ancient times. Much of recent composition theory, however, has focused attention on the writing process, and with this focus, has come a de-emphasis on the importance of teaching about style. Teachers, and, more particularly, tutors of composition need to find ways to integrate the current process-oriented theories with the work of composition theorists who still consider style to be a teachable art. This can be accomplished by looking at what has been said in the past about style—definitions and typologies of style, the contribution of linguistics studies to our understanding of style, its role in discourse—to glean what may be useful to tutors in talking to their students about style, and then incorporating that information with the work of Richard Lanham, Joseph Williams and other composition scholars who maintain that style still is "the inevitable subject" for writing students. The result is an understanding of how tutors can help their students to develop a sense of what good writing style is, and how they may intervene in their students' writing process to guide them toward creating their own unique writing styles.
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FOREWORD

Tutoring writing at CSUSB's Writing Center can offer a real smorgasbord of experiences, from helping students with the processes of invention, to suggesting heuristics for organization and development, to dealing with revisions required to improve a grade. As tutors, we are there to discover, first of all, where the students are in their own individual writing process and then to guide them in whatever direction they need to go to improve their work. In the best situations, this work is guided and enhanced by collaboration with the students' classroom instructors.

While my own ideal vision of the Writing Center is that of a place where students of all ability levels come to think about, talk about, and work on improving their writing skills, my experience there over the past two years indicates that, right now, the Center functions primarily as a place for remediation; the majority of students who use the services of writing tutors are required to do so, either as part of their contract under the Educational Opportunity Program, or as an adjunct to a basic writing course. Students come in to the Writing Center with a draft prepared for a class that is called, here at Cal State, "Intensive English," but which might be referred to elsewhere as "Preparation for College Writing," "Basic Composition," or,
as we get less polite, remedial or even "bonehead" English. Most of the students in this course are required to participate in tutorial sessions and are assigned to a specific tutor with a regular weekly half-hour appointment. Much of my tutoring time has been spent with students like these, so most of my remarks in the following pages are based on this perspective.

From the beginning, my own orientation toward tutoring involved concentrating on developing a sense of style in the students I tutored. I believed that this focus could be productive at any stage of the writing process, from the earliest drafts (what many people call the prewriting stage) through the final revision (which, if we are not careful, we might be tempted to call proofreading). My reasons for such a focus originally seemed to me to be more intuitive than academic, but, as I examined these reasons, they revealed their origins in the liberal arts curriculum to which I was exposed in the early sixties at a small Catholic women's college in the Northeast, in a city which referred to itself as, variously, the Athens of America or the Hub of the Universe. Those were more certain times and, in composition classes at Boston's Emmanuel College, the purpose of improving writing seemed to admit no other focus than a concentration on style.
But composition classes, and theories of composition, have changed considerably in the past twenty-five years, and, as I have pursued my duties in the Writing Center during the past two years, I have become aware of a slight sense of dislocation, a feeling that my approach to tutoring seemed slightly "out of sync" with current composition theory. The training seminars we tutors attended, the readings recommended to us, and the comments of instructors who sent students to work with us all pointed toward a concentration on the students' writing processes. In current theory, the individualized approach of tutoring is seen as a unique opportunity to help students become aware of those processes and so to improve their writing skills (North 431).

Such considerations, of course, made sense, but the feeling of dislocation persisted. How and when might a discussion of students' writing styles fit into these various process-oriented approaches to teaching or tutoring? The process-oriented theorists had little to say on the subject of style. This suggested that, nowadays, an assumption of the importance of an emphasis on style in writing can no longer be taken for granted. And my reasons for wanting to talk to students about their writing styles might require, at first, a thoughtful re-examination, and then, perhaps, a more process-oriented methodology before
they could be accepted on their merits. Are there still good reasons for talking about style in writing? And when and how is it appropriate to do so with our students? Are traditional approaches to the subject of style of any use in current methods of teaching composition? If so, what place should a concern for style take in an individual's writing process? The following pages are an attempt to provide some answers. Although these questions concern me as a neophyte classroom teacher, and the general principles that I will be discussing often have validity in that situation as well, my focus here is primarily on the tutorial process.
INTRODUCTION

The study of style—what it is, where it is found, and how it functions—has been a part of the philosophy and pedagogy of composition since the Greeks, so the very persistence of a concern for style in the philosophy of rhetoric from classical to modern times can be an argument for the inclusion of a theory of style in modern pedagogy. Just consider the origins of the notion of style; it is certainly one of the very earliest concerns in the study of composition. Aristotle discussed style in the third book of the Rhetoric; in it, he identified the qualities of good style to be appropriateness and, above all, clarity. He also discussed the importance of correct grammar and careful word choice in achieving distinction in the composition (Kennedy 78).

Following his lead, other writers in ancient rhetoric eventually codified these qualities of style into a standard list of style's four "virtues": correctness, clarity, ornamentation and propriety. Other ancient writers
concentrated on defining different kinds of style, usually breaking them down into "high, middle and plain," and discussing which kinds were appropriate for different types of discourse (Kennedy, 104). After the appearance, in 1426, of George Trebizond's *Five Books of Rhetoric*, these classical ideas about style became widely disseminated throughout Western Europe, thus paving the way for them to become an important part of composition pedagogy in our Western culture. Trebizond's last book was devoted to the study of style, with a claim in the preface that style is a subject which, unlike invention, can easily be taught to the young (Kennedy 202).

Perhaps this promise of simplicity has something to do with the fact that so much of the composition theory that came out of this tradition focused on ways of teaching skills that would produce a good style. We can probably also infer, from the proliferation of methods for teaching about style, that at least some of these methods proved practical in that those so trained were able to demonstrate some improvement in their discourse. Whatever the reasons, talking about and teaching about style remained a prominent part of composition studies. There were, to be sure, occasional fluctuations in the popularity of stylistic studies, but seldom did anyone seriously question their importance as part of the pedagogy of composition (Corbett,
"Approaches," 73). Indeed, in the 1960's, when the techniques of Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar became widely disseminated, linguists provided a whole new structure for stylistic studies, and composition classes started learning an entirely new vocabulary with which to describe and delineate various stylistic features.

Now, in the penultimate decade of the century, we seem to be ready for a new configuration for composition studies. But first, we need to understand what has happened to move us, whether as composition scholars, teachers, or tutors, away from the emphasis on style in writing. And then, if we still consider the teaching of writing to be tied in some way to teaching about style, we also need to redefine style in a way that integrates the traditional theories of style with current composition pedagogy. The first part of this paper will briefly examine the causes for recent changes in composition theory and how those changes have affected the study of style. Part II will suggest ways in which those new ideas may be combined with the best of what has been learned from more traditional approaches to the study of composition. It will also examine the work of some theorists who still consider style to be a teachable art. Finally, Part III will suggest ways to help students improve their writing by looking at the role of style in the writing process.
STYLE AND THE "PARADIGM SHIFT"

What has happened to cause the recent de-emphasis on—in some cases the complete disappearance of—the study of style in current composition theory? Since the early 1970's, a profound change in attitude has occurred in composition circles. Many composition theorists now believe that modern research into the composing process has offered grounds for developing a whole new theory of composition. Writing in 1978, Richard Young, borrowing from Thomas Kuhn's terminology for describing scientific revolutions, likened this trend to a "paradigm shift," a change from what he identified as the "current -traditional paradigm" which had held sway for the last three generations and was characterized by a devotion to "the sentence, the paragraph, usage, and style" (31), toward a new paradigm which has at its heart an emphasis on "the formal arts of invention...and the recent and rapidly growing interest in the composing process" (35).

Young acknowledged the difficulty of discussing and comparing paradigms when so much of our understanding of what is acceptable is tacit. He did, however, suggest that
it was possible to describe the current-traditional paradigm in terms of its "overt features" which he described as:

The emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs; the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); the preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper; and so forth. (31)

Young's classifying a concern with style as a feature of an old, probably soon to be outmoded, model for teaching composition points toward the difficulty many of the newer composition pedagogies have had with incorporating a concern with style. However, in Young's view, the change from the current-traditional paradigm to a new paradigm was not a completed event, but was rather a phenomenon that was still happening even as scholars attempted to recognize and describe it. He therefore declared the development of composition theory to be in a crisis state, with the old paradigm being questioned before a new set of standards and solutions had been fully developed. He called for new research that would help scholars to form judgments and make decisions about the emergent competing theories (39).
Young did not really discuss the reasons for this change but rather described it thoughtfully, making suggestions for dealing with it. Since his work, though, others have come to view a fundamental change in attitude toward composition studies as a \textit{fait accompli}, with accounting for and explaining it the only business still to be done. Maxine Hairston's 1982 publication of "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing" is one such attempt. We might argue that her confusion in metaphors in the title reflects a similar confusion in the work: must we take as fact the assumption that the changing attitudes toward teaching composition constitute a revolution, with all the violent associations of overthrow and destruction that such a word evokes? The meteorological metaphor may be the better one to follow; we can imagine that a change in the wind direction can bring something fresh and new without causing any fundamental change in the landscape. Certainly, though, Hairston is convinced: process is in, product is out. She includes in her article a list of what she sees as the salient features of the new paradigm for teaching composition:

- It focuses on the writing process; instructors intervene in students' writing during the process.
- It teaches strategies for invention and discovery; instructors help students to generate content and
discover purpose. It is rhetorically based; audience, purpose, and occasion figure prominently in the assignment of writing tasks. Instructors evaluate the written product by how well it fulfills the writer's intention and meets the audience's needs. It views writing as a recursive rather than a linear process; pre-writing, writing, and revision are activities that overlap and intertwine. It is holistic, viewing writing as an activity that involves the intuitive and non-rational as well as the rational faculties. It emphasizes that writing is a way of learning and developing as well as a communication skill. It includes a variety of writing modes, expressive as well as expository. It is informed by other disciplines, especially cognitive psychology and linguistics. It views writing as a disciplined creative activity that can be analyzed and described; its practitioners believe that writing can be taught. It is based on linguistic research and research into the composing process. It stresses the principle that writing teachers should be people who write. (86)

If Hairston's list is taken to be definitive of the currently acceptable approach to the teaching of composition, though, it raises some troubling questions, particularly for those who wish to concentrate on ways and
means of fostering a sense of style in their pedagogy. As she defines it, the new, process-oriented model has no place for such a concentration. Perhaps, if we are determined, we may read something in to the principle that the new teaching methods must be "rhetorically based," but nowhere is the importance of teaching style made explicit. It almost seems as if, in order to make room for the emphasis on the importance of invention and the concurrent necessity for understanding and delineating the composing process, the teaching of style had to be set aside. Hairston suggests that Mina Shaughnessy's work was probably the signal for the "revolution" in teaching composition because it pointed out that "we have to try to understand what goes on during the internal act of writing and we have to intervene during the act of writing if we want to affect its outcome" (84).

The point is well taken. Anyone who has read Errors and Expectations cannot fail to be impressed by the deep commitment and impressive scholarship Shaughnessy brought to the tasks of analyzing the causes of writing difficulties and discovering new strategies for overcoming them. That 1977 publication, if it did not begin a revolution, certainly made obvious the necessity for concentrating on the process of writing. It is interesting to note, however, that Shaughnessy herself did not slight the importance of teaching about style, and, in her section on vocabulary,
offers several suggestions for helping inexperienced writers achieve an awareness of what constitutes effective writing (221-224).

Yet, since Shaughnessy's work, the apparent bias against any concentration on style in Hairston's definition of the "new paradigm" remains in much of composition theory. Style is frequently ignored or, when discussed, is considered to be one of the lesser aspects of that step in the composing process called revision. In an article that addresses this problem, Elizabeth Rankin goes so far as to say "style is out of style." In much of the writing on process-oriented theory, she sees an "implied opposition between invention and style" and points out the negative connotations in the word "product" when opposed to the word "process." She suggests that style suffers "guilt by association" with product-oriented theory (8).

Others are troubled by this recently enforced dichotomy as well. For example, Neil Besner, in an article in English Quarterly, suggests that we do not gain much by creating arguments that pit process-oriented approaches against product-oriented ones.

Process and product should not be understood as binary opposites. They are not opposed theories or practices; furthermore, if significance emerges from studying
their relations, it does so not by virtue of their opposition, but because of all the meanings we have come to associate with process; the various concepts of process have assigned meaning, most of it pejorative, to "product." (9)

So if this emphasis change from product to process has caused interest in teaching about style to decline, perhaps we should reexamine that result. The "opposition" to stylistic studies may come from an unintended but not surprising natural tendency of those who embrace a new theory to overstate the deficiencies of the old. Rankin suggests as much when she concludes that what is needed now is a new approach to the teaching of style that integrates both the work of theorists who still consider style to be a teachable art and the new insights of process-oriented theorists:

A new theory of style would have certain pedagogical consequences. By broadening our narrow definitions of style, it would force us to reconsider our notions of when, where, and how style can be taught in the process-centered classroom. Is it best to encourage students to prioritize content and form as they go through the writing process—or can style sometimes be profitably focused on even in earliest drafts? Is it
enough to concentrate on those aspects of style that are most accessible to conscious control—or are there ways of reaching and shaping the less conscious processes too? And what about style as voice? Is it something the writer discovers within his or her unique self—or is it an interpretive construct the writer creates as he/she goes along? (12)

Some of the questions Rankin has raised are yet to be answered; indeed, they may be impossible to answer in a definitive way as far as classroom instruction is concerned. It does seem, though, that composition tutors, with the unique advantage they have as teachers who can work with students individually, may be able to come up with particularly appropriate answers to some of these questions about how and when to teach about style to each individual student.

Of course tutors as well as teachers who wish to concentrate their efforts on teaching their students about style must also acknowledge the need to understand process-oriented theory and incorporate it into their approach to the task. After all, when the winds of change are blowing, no one wants to be out there alone, spitting into them.
INTEGRATING PROCESS-ORIENTED THEORY
WITH TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO STYLE

How can tutors help students to develop both a sense of what style is and the ability to express themselves in their own unique way, taking into account and incorporating what has been learned about the composing process? Unless we are willing to discard several centuries of accumulated wisdom regarding the subject of style, it makes sense to look first at some of the theories about teaching style, either from the long-standing classical tradition or the more recently developed field of linguistic analysis, that preceded the current trend. Doing so will not only clarify what we mean when we talk about "style," but may also show us what we can use in our attempts to teach our students to develop their own styles in writing.

Of course, style-oriented theories can be criticized for not taking into account the writing process, for being too product-based, relying as they often do on the use of models for imitation, the classification of discourse into different modes, or close analysis of text. Indeed, by looking at good style in writing as a skill to be learned
rather than an innate ability to be fostered, they may seem
to run counter to currently acceptable perceptions of what
the act of composing entails. Nonetheless, we can surely
find material here that can be helpful to tutors who wish to
help students become aware of and develop their own sense of
style.

Following this, we should also look at what has been
said by some of those composition scholars who "still
consider style to be a teachable art," and see when and how
process-oriented theories of composition might be integrated
into their methodology. This should yield insights that
composition tutors are particularly well suited to use, and
also, perhaps, lay to rest the unease that many of us have
come to feel when discussing style with our students.

Definitions of Style

In any overview of the traditional approaches to
teaching about style in writing, we immediately encounter
some difficulty. By no means is there a unanimity of
opinion about how to go about the task, or even about what
style is. We find that rhetoricians have told us one thing,
for example, that style is the art by which the writer
chooses language to achieve particular effects (Corbett 86).
On the other hand, linguists will hold an entirely different perspective: for instance, that style is a quantifiable aspect of writing, the "aggregate of contextual probabilities of linguistic items" in a text (Enkvist 120). If we turn to writers of manuals of style, we are apt to find an aphorism designed to support whatever approach the author has decided to take in his text: "Style is outlook...discovered through the activity of writing (Eastman ix); or "style is the writer" (Strunk and White 70). Differences in definition frequently seem to hinge on philosophical arguments concerning whether or not the entity "style" is an inseparable part of the meaning of a piece of writing or if it is always a singular, individual attribute of the author of the piece—what Louis Milic calls the distinction between "Crocean aesthetic monism" and "psychological monism" (257).

Therefore, as Rankin's final question indicates, we still have no certainty about whether different styles are unique expressions of the writers' inner selves or are interpretive constructs which grow out of the meaning of their work. It may be impossible to determine which is the "right" answer here, but, for the purpose of garnering what can be used by tutors who wish to incorporate teaching about style into a process-oriented methodology, there really is no need to take up one side and discard the other of an
argument that has been going on since classical times and which threatens to be unending.

Writers' styles may indeed be, or become, part of their meaning; that does not preclude the notion that an individual's style is unique. This really provides a working answer, at least for tutorial situations, to another of the questions Rankin asks. Should students prioritize form over content—or vice versa—in their early drafts? It really depends on where they are, and tutors have an excellent opportunity to discover, through conversation with the writer, what is going on in a particular piece of writing. If a student's writing style somehow causes meaning to drift from what the writer intends, for example, tutors can point that out; if the student is struggling to speak in an authentic, personal voice, tutors can recognize and foster that effort.

To make that recognition easier, however, a process-oriented approach certainly requires a definition of style that focuses attention on the writer of the composition rather than on the composed product. Many of the modern texts on style have already taken that step. When Eastman bases his pedagogy on the premise that style is the discovery for writers of their own outlook, he exemplifies such a focus; when Peter Elbow talks about "real
voice" as an expression of the writer's "real self" (293), he is referring to style; even in Strunk and White's pre-process theory The Elements of Style, when we read, "the beginner should approach style warily, recognizing that it is he himself he is approaching" (55), we recognize the necessity for such a definition. Bruce Bawer, in The Contemporary Stylist defines style simply as "the rendering of your personality on paper" (186).

Such a definition of style is process-centered, and it can provide a productive focus for tutors. Our task, then, becomes an enabling one, that of helping our students to discern appropriate choices, in topic, diction, syntax, and tone, for the writing task in which they are engaged—choices that will allow writers to express clearly their unique viewpoint.

Typologies of Style

This is not to say that tutors can learn nothing from more product-oriented studies of style, such as the various efforts of linguists who focus on psychological and sociological aspects of style. In the work of people like Huntington Brown and Martin Joos, we find strenuous efforts to analyze the function of style by categorizing different
Brown's typology, for instance, consists of five recognizable styles which he calls the deliberative, the expository, the tumbling, the prophetic, and the indenture style (12-15). On the other hand, Martin Joos, in his treatise *The Five Clocks*, has also come up with a list of five styles which seem to have very little correspondence to Brown's. Joos sees these styles as coinciding in some ways with increasing maturity and labels them as "intimate, casual, consultative, formal and frozen" (111). In an essay which examines how writers' styles are related to their personalities, Stephen Ullman cites several examples of psychologically based typologies of style, including that of Henri Morier, who was able to define seventy different classes of style "each corresponding to a certain temperament and mental make-up" (161). Despite arguments that such typologies are misleading because they focus attention on "the specious and minor similarities" (Milic, 292) of writers, tutors can still find, in these increasingly complex and often contradictory attempts to provide a functional analysis of style, a vocabulary with which to discuss and compare as they talk to students about their own writing.

Tutors might even more productively focus on the work of Northrop Frye, who also argues the necessity for some scheme of classification in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. In his
fourth essay in that work and, later, in "A Manual of Style" from The Well-Tempered Critic, he puts forth and develops just such a system. He defines the literary roles of the various combinations that derive from the "three primary verbal rhythms: the verse rhythm dominated by recurring beat, the prose rhythm dominated by the sentence with its subject-predicate relation, and the associative rhythm dominated by the short and irregular phrase" (Well-Tempered Critic 55). Frye relates these rhythms, and the secondary and tertiary rhythms which they produce in combination with one another, to the classical divisions of high, middle, and plain or low style. Understanding style in this way, a writing tutor can bring to bear a generally applicable, and therefore far more flexible, system for analyzing students' work and for teaching students to recognize what is going on in it for themselves.

It should probably be noted that Richard Lanham criticizes this categorization because the divisions of high, middle and low are "morally loaded." He offers the alternative suggestion that we should think of varying styles as representing different shades in a spectrum of style, with a range of coloration from the almost completely opaque (that is, a style which exists only to call attention to itself) to crystalline transparency at the opposite end (writing whose aim and only purpose is to transmit
information) (47-68). Still, despite his disclaimers, Lanham's spectrum looks remarkably like Frye's much earlier analysis of style, overlaid with the language that signals an attitude toward writing as process. What is important for tutors to recognize about both of these approaches is that various styles in writing are really interrelated, and that those relationships can yield as many different styles of writing as there are writers.

Using Models for Style

The classical tradition also gives us the opportunity to consider style by looking at models of good writing. In an example of this approach, Edward White's The Writer's Control of Tone supplies an anthology of readings with suggestions for analysis of the language for its appropriateness to the subject. Actually, as White says, this is an analysis of only one part of style: "Tone is a matter of relationship..., a narrower and clearer term than 'style' which includes all aspects of how something is said: diction, syntax, rhythm, metaphor, point of view, and so forth" (Introduction, ix).
Employing anthologies of readings thus to analyze and discuss various authors' styles might be useful as a tutorial method when we wish to point out how a writer's attitude toward his material and his audience contributes to the writing's final effect. Given the realities of the time constraints placed on most tutorial sessions, though, spending time to read and compare various authors is seldom practical. Despite such time limits, using prose models to talk to students about what makes writing good and to give them opportunities to acquire the skill to manipulate language to produce an effective style of their own is an application of an idea with a long rhetorical tradition behind it, and it probably ought not be too easily discarded.

**Linguistics and Style**

A somewhat different approach to analyzing style has been provided by the scientific methods of linguists. The increasing use of computers to assist in that analysis has allowed students of style to effectively chart stylistic features of the language. Here, too, we may find information that tutors can use to enhance their abilities.
to talk with their students about how their writing works. William Gruber suggests that linguistic analysis teaches students to "begin to think of writing in terms of form and in terms of the particular linguistic devices that contribute to form" (493). Despite its being a text-based, and therefore unarguably a product-oriented approach to teaching about writing, the ability to recognize the linguistic devices that shape all writing is certainly a lesson that tutors ought to learn, if only to increase our ability to diagnose the particular writing problems that our students face.

Linguistics studies can contribute in other ways to our understanding of how to teach style. For instance, Edward Corbett's method of close textual analysis consists of gathering data on the selected piece of prose—tabulating objectively observable items such as average number of words per sentence, sentences per paragraph, repeated words, specific types of imagery, monosyllabism, etc.—and then subjecting these statistics to a scrutiny designed to discover the rhetorical implications contained therein (332-352). Although once again the time limitations of most tutorial situations would prevent the complete application of Corbett's method when looking at student writing, tutors might fruitfully borrow from his techniques to show students ways to look at their own writing and decide if their
choices serve their intentions.

Other linguistically based methods for teaching about style might also offer helpful insights. In his essay, "Generative Grammars," Richard Ohmann has compiled a list of twelve, which he says "will suggest, but not exhaust the multiplicity of approaches" (134). Ohmann believes that, in order to be successful, any approach to the study and analysis of style must include what linguistic and semantic theory can add to our understanding of it (135). In a separate essay, "Literature as Sentences," he concentrates on the fundamental role of the sentence and suggests, "the elusive intuition we have of form and content may turn out to be anchored in a distinction between the surface structures and the deep structures of sentences" (156). So, even though most tutoring situations may not allow the opportunity to apply the specialized skills of transformational analysis or structural linguistics to student writing in fine, a general knowledge of such systems allows tutors to see that helping students develop their own styles is really a matter of bringing those deep structures to their surface realizations.

Nils Enkvist adds another dimension to linguistically based examinations of the function of style by concentrating on the importance of context:
Style is concerned with frequencies of linguistic items in a given context and thus with contextual probabilities. To measure the style of a passage, the frequencies of its linguistic items of different levels must be compared with the corresponding features in another text or corpus which is regarded as a norm and which has a definite contextual relationship with this passage....An appeal to context here obviates the need for references to extralinguistic meaning....(120)

Unfortunately, the apparent simplicity of Enkvist's argument that style is the link between context and linguistic form is complicated by his definition of context:

Contexts ... must be defined on several levels, and contextual components can be further classified into various, elaborate patterns. To classify all categories of context a priori is impossible,... All we can attempt is a limited theory of selection by sociophysical setting, and we must be prepared to revise this limited theory to keep it up to date as changes in our modes of life suggest new, significant context categories. Such new categories often invite projection into the past as well; thus our constant revaluation of old literary texts may partly depend on recent shifts in context classification. (121)
Certainly an understanding of context is important to the study of style, but binding style so tightly to context would seem to leave teachers of composition standing on constantly shifting ground. The necessarily frequent re-evaluations of their position might leave little time at all to teach about style. The "appeal to context" though, in more general terms, certainly has validity for many tutoring situations; we would want to guide our students toward one kind of style to write a personal experience essay, but in quite a different stylistic direction to write a research paper, for example, or a lab report.

Talking about the differing writing contexts that their students face can also lead tutor-student conversations quite naturally into a discussion of the audience for their work. The idea that writing is almost always addressed to someone, and that we need to conceptualize that audience before we can write effectively, is an aspect of style that inexperienced writers often overlook. This may be due to the artificiality of the construct. The very word "audience" suggests listeners, after all, not readers. James Britton, discussing awareness of a sense of audience in *The Development of Writing Abilities* writes:

The concept of context of situation has been shaped very much with speakers in mind and needs to be
modified for writers. For the writer it does not consist of the immediate environment, but rather of the universe of discourse he is entering (business letter, official document, short story)—the situation of writing this kind of thing in this sort of society for this sort of person. The writer, then, must construe his audience on the basis of clues which are harder to come by since they are on a more generalized plane. To put it another way, the writer does not, like the speaker, have the context of situation displayed before him, but must "represent to himself" a context of situation, and this includes his readers. (61)

Tutors can help their students in this regard by being that audience, asking the questions that seem appropriate for the kind of audience the writer wants to address. The necessity for awareness of writing context also points tutors toward the importance of collaboration with classroom instructors who, after all, define the writing context for their students.

Style and Discourse

Finally, the combination of rhetorical analysis of prose models with linguistic theories has also yielded one
more approach to the study of style which seems eminently well-suited to tutoring situations. This is the widely popularized method of teaching by means of "sentence combining" exercises. Charles Cooper presents a forceful argument for using this approach in a classroom with younger students, but his remarks have validity for college tutorial sessions as well:

Used with an informal approach in correcting deviancy from standard English usage... they permit the teacher to guiltlessly eliminate the teaching of a formal grammar since both these activities--informal approach to deviancy and sentence combining problems--fulfill the traditional goals of grammar study: standard usage and control of written syntax. Presented as another language game in a class where there is also an engaging writing program, they will increase ... facility with the nominative and adjective structures of written English. (371)

Cooper advocates a carefully constructed system to cover the differing types of embeddings and substitutions in order of ascending difficulty, starting with simple adjective embeddings in the upper elementary grades and moving on to more difficult multiple embeddings and substitutions.
A more sophisticated approach to teaching style at the sentence level is that of Francis Christiansen, who champions what he calls the "cumulative sentence" as "the typical sentence of modern English" (192). This brings to the teaching of the sentence a study of the principles of levels of abstraction and of texture. Christiansen, too, stresses the need for a carefully constructed approach, beginning with fairly simple two-level narrative sentences, then moving on to multilevel narrative sentences and finally to brief narratives of several sentences. He feels that such an approach "can hardly fail to be exciting to a class: it is life, with the variety and complexity of life; the workbook exercise is death" (196).

Perhaps Christiansen's enthusiasm for the cumulative sentence has caused him to overstate the case for its stylistic importance. In a rebuttal to Christiansen's argument, Robert Walker has prepared a statistical analysis of the work of ten British and American authors. He concludes that the "typical sentence" is in fact not cumulative but rather the old-fashioned complex sentence. He concludes: "We should thank Professor Christiansen for teaching it [the cumulative sentence] to us. It is beautiful and useful. It is a sign of mature style, but only one of many signs." And finally, he touts his own personal favorite: "We should drill parallel structure,"
parallelism in all parts of the sentence: in words, in phrases and clauses, including free modifiers. It is the most common and fundamental of the rhetorical schemes" (378).

Walker, of course, in his somewhat arbitrary choice of authors for analysis, begs the question of what is really "typical," but his comments serve to illustrate how the very debate that each new theory generates merely serves as grist to our mills. All this discussion about what kinds of sentences to teach and how to teach them, about the varying ways that style can be defined, discovered and measured, only emphasizes the virtually infinite possibilities that are open to students as they create their own styles. That breadth of opportunity is what makes the task of teaching composition a challenging as well as an exciting job for teachers, and it can serve that same purpose for the tutors who cooperate with them in that endeavor. The wider the range of choices that tutors can offer to students as they explore the composing process together, the more likely the development of an authentic writing voice becomes.
STYLE'S PLACE IN CURRENT PROCESS-ORIENTED THEORIES

What, then, beyond the simple awareness that composing is a process, might the study of more recent process-oriented theorists add to the tutor's repertoire of strategies for helping students develop their own styles? How can these theories be integrated, as Rankin suggests they ought to be, with the idea that good writing style is a teachable art? The work of several contemporary composition critics offers interesting possibilities.

For example, Winston Weathers has re-examined the idea of applying the principle of teaching through imitation and come up with a meaning for the word "model" that differs somewhat from the traditional definition of rhetoricians. Weathers proposes that composition instructors incorporate their own performance as writers into their approach:

Such a program would entail original composition by the teacher, at the blackboard, at least three to five minutes each class—or at least a five to ten minute performance once a week.... Even if our demonstration
is faulty and less than excellent, the fact that the teacher "did something" is noteworthy. And I have found that students actually learn a great deal from watching a teacher put in a word, take out a word, rewrite a sentence.... Believe me: the teacher's struggle amidst the chalk dust can become the student's education. (331)

Though the situation of tutors, who will have, at most, two or three students, differs considerably from that of the classroom instructor, Muriel Harris suggests that they might fruitfully employ a strategy of demonstration as well: tutors could first do some writing for the student, talking about how they go about it as they do it ("thinking out loud") and then would ask students to do the same. Harris claims that the success she has found with this method indicates that "we need to think long and hard about showing, not telling, students about composing processes" (79).

This strategy of demonstration can be a powerful tool. As more experienced writers, most composition tutors are relatively comfortable with the reasons they have for making changes in their writing even in the very act of composing it. Very often, this "shaping at the point of utterance," as James Britton calls it (62), is a kind of revision that
starts with the very earliest drafts, shaping the form as well as the content of what we want to say. It is, in fact, an example of how a concern with style is part of the very beginnings of the composing process. If we can explain, as we go along in our demonstration, why we make the decisions that we do, we can illuminate for our students both the range of choices and the necessity for making them.

Another thoughtful attempt to give to the teaching of style a more process-oriented, theoretical context is Donald Murray's "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery", in which he argues that rewriting is an "inevitable part of the writing process" wherein writers continue to discover and define what they wish to say even as they shape it. Murray suggests that instructors are frequently reluctant to admit their own personal knowledge of how often meaning is discovered during revision.

One professor of philosophy...confessed he had been ashamed of the way he wrote, that he didn't know what to say or how to say it when he sat down to write. He had to write and write and write to find out what he had to say. He was embarrassed and didn't want his colleagues to know how dumb he was.... I suspect such unjustified shame is more prevalent than we like to admit. (87)
Murray gives this process, in which writers discover their meaning through rewriting successive drafts, the name of "internal revision" and distinguishes it from the separate act of "external revision," in which writers concentrate on editing and polishing what they have written in order to direct it to a particular audience (92).

Murray's examination of revision as a part of the whole writing process, rather than as a product-oriented task which is begun after the real business of writing is over with, can certainly be helpful in laying to rest the discomfort that seems to have become prevalent when talking about style, because it shows how inextricably interwoven revision can be with invention or discovery of meaning.

In another work, he suggests that this part of the writing process is akin to a dialogue with another "self," an internal conversation that helps to shape and clarify ideas for the writing self: "The self proposes, the other self considers. The self makes, the other self evaluates. The two selves collaborate: a problem is spotted, discussed, defined; solutions are proposed, rejected, suggested, attempted, tested, discarded, accepted" ("Teaching the Other Self" 140). He suggests that teaching composition actually entails bringing that other self to life for inexperienced writers. "The teacher...then works with that other self so
that, after the student has graduated, the other self can take over the function of teacher" (142). This idea calls to mind Britton's notion that writers must learn how to "represent" their readers to themselves in order to know if their writing will be effective, and, again, the writing tutorial is an ideal environment for this kind of learning. Indeed, Murray himself notes that "this is done most efficiently in conference" (142).

Another source of support for those who wish to integrate teaching about style into a process-based composition theory might be found in current methods of literary criticism. Betsy Brown's study, "Current Trends in Teaching Written Composition," notes that "the shift in interest from the textual product to the writing process in composition research has been paralleled by a shift in theories of style and form from interest in the text to interest in the reader" (298). The result has been a whole body of criticism which presupposes a transactional model of writing, generally grouped together under the name of "reader-response" critical theory. In his The Philosophy of Composition, E.D. Hirsch draws upon the principles of that theory when he proposes that we reduce style to a single principle which he calls "relative readability." He defines it thus: "One prose style is better than another when it communicates the same meaning as the other does but requires
Although Hirsch has been criticized for propounding a theory that oversimplifies the study of style, his remarks lead us once again, as Britton and Murray have already done, to the importance of considering the audience for writing. The emphasis here, however, suggests ways that tutors may intervene in the composing process of their students. Rather than simply helping them to define the writing context, tutors actually become part of that context. Linda Flower points out the necessity of teaching students to concentrate attention on the reader in her discussion of how we can guide students to move away from producing what she terms "writer-based prose" and toward a more readable style in which the writers make a conscious attempt to communicate their thoughts to a realized audience (191). Tutors are in an excellent position to assist in that attempt by becoming, for the duration of a tutoring session, an informed and responsive audience for their students' writing.

Other composition specialists, like Richard Lanham, have also tried to reassert the importance of the study of style by searching for a more process-oriented theoretical context for it. In 1974, in the introduction to his somewhat defensively titled *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, he wrote:
There is only one inevitable "subject" for a course in writing, writing itself—style. Any writing course in America today should aim at an acute self-consciousness about style. For this purpose, style itself must be the object of contemplation. Writing courses usually stress, not style, but rhetoric's other two traditional parts, finding arguments and arranging them. (13)

Clearly, Lanham too recognized the effects that the parameters of the emerging new model for teaching composition seemed to have on the traditional concern for style, but he acknowledged the advantages in an approach that considers writing as process. He echoed Murray in his discussion of how style influences what a writer decides to say:

People want to say what they are good at saying, can say most gracefully.... Our idea is clarified in the writing. We then think again, the idea before us. Words form idea. Then the reverse. This becomes a process, not a one-time event.... It is not entirely true that ideas matter and words don't. It is not entirely true that you have not really had an idea until you've expressed it in words. Both are half-truths, stages of a process. (38)

Eventually, Lanham solves the dilemma of the implied
opposition between a process orientation and a product-centered theory by simply refusing to treat it as a problem, certainly a sensible attitude if one considers the argument to be a largely artificial one. This is not to imply, however, that Lanham has embraced completely the idea that style can be taught in an exclusively process-oriented way. In a later work, *Revising Prose*, his suggestions for improving writing style are definitely product-oriented and are offered, as such, without apology:

People often argue that writing cannot be taught, and if they mean that inspiration cannot be commanded nor laziness banished, then of course they are right. But stylistic analysis — revision — is something else, a method, not a mystical rite. How we compose — pray for the muse, marshall our thoughts, find the willpower to glue backside to chair — these may be idiosyncratic, but revision belongs to the public domain. Anyone can learn it. (Preface vii)

The chapters that follow this preface offer several suggestions for repairing bad prose, a sequence of strategies that he refers to as his "paramedic method." His steps for revision are couched in clear, if occasionally trenchant, language and offer students of writing a number of ways to clarify their ideas and write prose that pleases
rather than perplexes. Lanham's discussion of such tricks of revision as restoring nominalized verbs to their active state, converting predicates from passive to active voice, and varying sentence lengths to achieve a pleasing prose rhythm is not only informative but fun to read, especially when he harangues against the horrors that lack of attention to such details can produce. It also can offer tutors of writing an accessible guide to various strategies which they can in turn pass on to their students as they see the need for them.

Joseph Williams mines this same vein with his *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Written in 1981, revised in 1985 and again in 1988, this guide also invokes what seems to have become the power word of the last decade and a half; in his preface to teachers Williams writes: "I have tried to approach style as process, as an achievement. The first step in that process is to get something down on paper. But that's the easy part. The serious part of writing is rewriting." Indeed, Williams does take it seriously. His lessons, though concise, are dense with detail, and would probably be intimidating to inexperienced writers. For tutors however, and for anyone interested in explaining to others why certain stylistic choices are better than others, or how the different elements of sentences function together to give not only style but
meaning to writing, Williams' book is invaluable.

While both Lanham's and Williams' work can certainly be helpful to tutors who need a methodology for doing stylistic revision with their students, they are by no means breakthroughs in teaching theory. Indeed, many of the same suggestions can be found in much older style manuals, one of the best of which was, and still is, Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. This was first published by Macmillan in 1959 but, as E. B. White makes clear in his introduction, it is based on a privately produced college handbook first distributed in 1918, back in the heyday of those product-oriented prescriptivists. The main difference between this manual and the more recent efforts seems to be the context in which the argument for concentrating on style is couched. Perhaps we can learn from this that it is not, after all, necessary to justify our interest in maintaining the importance of teaching about style. An orientation that allows us to look at writing as process does not preclude an emphasis on style; it merely requires us to determine its place in that process for each individual writer.

Finally, we can consider perhaps the whole argument—that stylistic study has lost its importance as a result of the changing paradigm for composition scholarship—to be moot if we look at it as a result of an
attempt to impose a scientific construct on a field that really cannot sustain such treatment. Robert Conners, in his analysis of the application of Kuhn's theories to composition studies, wonders why so many composition scholars seem determined to consider composition studies to be a truly scientific discipline. He concludes that "the universe of discourse is larger than the universe of science, and seductive though the puzzle solving of normal science may be, it has always been the task of rhetoricians to try to solve problems and not puzzles" (20).

A narrow consideration of style in writing as something that is only imposed as we proofread and polish our texts may allow us to treat it as one small piece in the great mosaic of the composing process and conveniently assign it a place, but it prevents us from taking full advantage of what we have learned about that process. Considerations of style can occur at any time: during the discovery of what we want to say as we choose what we can say gracefully, during our exploration of who the audience for our work will be as we tailor our language to meet their needs, and during revision as we test our discourse against our own standards for rhythm, conciseness and clarity. So, whether we look at teaching about style as a process-oriented task or as a product-oriented task seems, after all, less important than the commitment we make to consider it to be an inescapable
component of the teaching of composition. To that end, it seems clear that we ought not ignore methodologies for teaching composition that concentrate on style simply because they may be seen as overly concerned with writing as product. Nor should we fail to recognize that teaching about style is an essential part of teaching writing as process.

Of course, in all of the theories about teaching composition that have been discussed here, there are reasons to stop short of unqualified acceptance of one "right" way to go about the task. It seems far more productive for tutors of writing to recognize that each approach has merits and that, from among this array of heuristics, we are free to choose what will work best for the very individualized needs of each of our students.

Indeed, this opportunity to tailor our teaching methods to each individual is probably the single greatest advantage that tutoring has over regular classroom instruction. William Irmser, in an interview published in The Writing Instructor, sounded almost wistful in his remarks: "It seems that people are multiplying things to do in the composition class. We have to be realistic. We have to do certain things to fill up class time.... I realize it might be better if we could just meet with students..." (9).
Clearly, as tutors of writing, we are in a position to be envied.

With privilege comes responsibility. Because we are in a unique position to intervene in the composing process, we have an obligation to understand our place well and use our advantage wisely. Stephen North, in an article that addresses itself to tutor training, identifies three principles upon which it should be based: that tutors must learn to start from where the writer is, that they must know how to encourage the writer to "engage in or reflect on composing," and that those who would train tutors must do tutoring themselves (436). Certainly these suggestions lead us to a concentration on our students' writing processes, but they do not necessarily preclude a concomitant focus on their writing as product, as something that can be analyzed and improved. I have probably fulfilled North's last requirement that tutor trainers should do tutoring themselves by working with students for the past two years in the Writing Center at CSUSB. I offer, in the pages that follow, some reflections and suggestions concerning how tutors may "start from where the writer is," recognizing that teaching students how to "engage in composing" requires the ability to look at the product as well as the process in a constantly recursive fashion.
In working with students at the Writing Center, I have tried to combine some of the traditional approaches to teaching about style—analysis of students' work for specific stylistic features, suggestions for improvement of syntax, and use of prose models for imitation—with methods that take into account the process of writing—discussion of how what students want to say helps determine how they say it, freewriting as a discovery heuristic for not only content but form, and intervention during either my own or the students' writing either to ask or to answer questions about it.

While I believe the primary tutoring model to be conversation between two people who are interested in the writing task at hand, sometimes students arrive at a tutorial session with "nothing to do," especially near the beginning of the quarter. When this is the case, I occasionally ask students to do writing assignments of my own devising or writing exercises that address what may be a regularly recurring problem. What we do together in any
particular session is influenced by—in fact is practically determined by—where the student is when he or she walks into the center on the day of the appointment. Whatever we do, the focus is on style because I believe that talking about what makes writing good means talking about style. It is, as Lanham writes, the "inevitable subject."

In the first sessions we frequently concentrate on diagnosis: what is or is not working in the student's writing: how it is effective, when and why it is not. As we move through the quarter, we usually spend some sessions exploring and developing the student's sense of audience, and others on working on stylistic choices at, respectively, the levels of the word, the phrase, and the sentence. Here we discuss students' purposes: why they have made particular choices or whether they were even aware of their options. Whatever hierarchy there is to the importance of these discussions is based on what the individual student needs to do to get from one to the other. For example, some students may find it helpful to spend almost all of their tutoring sessions examining writing assignments from the various perspectives that different imagined audiences generate, while others, already comfortable with their understanding of audience, are far more interested in playing with language to see what different effects they can create. The samples of students' writing in this practicum, though used
anonymously, are included with the students' permission, for which I express my gratitude.

Talking about Audience

With the possible exception of journal writing, almost all the composition work that students do is writing for someone else. While students are undoubtedly aware of this fact, its implications for them in terms of how they go about their particular writing tasks often seem lost upon them. Usually, a question about audience elicits a surprised look, followed by the patient explanation of a person who is forced to belabor the obvious: "Well, it's for Dr. _____, of course!" And, of course, the writing that results from this simple understanding of audience usually fairly groans with the effort to give to instructors what they are perceived to want. Syntax is fractured, phrasing twists grotesquely, and meaning recedes before an onslaught of nominalizations and passive constructions.

Still, the stylistic muddle that is produced is probably less painful to read than it was difficult to write. Surely beleaguered composition instructors have not asked for this. Rather, it is probably a demonstration of what Richard Lanham has dubbed the "School Style," which he
says comes to students "more by example and osmosis than by
direct teaching" (Revising Prose, 80). Lanham suggests that
students may fall into this style whenever writing is a task
imposed on them, or when they believe that what they write
may not be read with real attention to anything but the
possibility of error. For these students, as Mina
Shaughnessy says, "academic writing is a trap, not a way of
saying something" (9).

What can tutors do to ameliorate this situation? We
can start, I think, by providing, in ourselves, an
alternative audience for our students, a real audience
instead of the threatening, judgmental one they might have
mistakenly conceived. And we ought to make this status, as
audience, explicit for them. This requires us to engage in
conversation with them in such a way that they can see us as
people who are at least as interested in what they have to
say as in how they go about saying it. By doing so, we also
supply them with the "other self" of which Donald Murray
writes.

As inexperienced writers, many students who seek
tutorial help in writing don't realize the need to develop
the interior dialogue that more practiced writers engage in
when probing their ideas and evaluating their writing. In
The Practical Tutor, Meyer and Smith refer to this as a
"dialogic habit of mind" that is necessary to good writing and suggest that tutors ask questions that call for "amplification, specification, or qualification," or which encourage writers to test hypotheses and examine evidence (37). Usually, this means that we ought not begin by focusing on surface features of their writing—punctuation, syntax and spelling—but rather on such questions as what their purpose is in writing about a particular subject and where they draw their knowledge of it from. Once we have established ourselves as another audience for our students, we will have a more concrete base on which to build comparisons of how a sense of audience does and should influence the stylistic choices we all make as we write.

Flower writes of the necessity for "teaching students to recognize their own Writer-Based prose and transform it" (37). To further develop the sense of audience that can help them do this, working on some exercises which call for writing for differing audiences can be helpful. An example of such an exercise is in the appendix (Exercise 1). Exercises like these relieve students of the burden of invention, and give them as well the context of situation that Britton speaks of. They can then focus on style and arrangement.

While exercises like this can generate some interesting
responses, they are, after all, still a form of fiction writing for students. The next step would logically be to encourage them to apply what they have learned about the changing requirements of tone and voice to some practical writing task of their own. Here, again, there is no substitute for conversation. We might ask if any of their own experiences in the marketplace have left them frustrated, angry, or disgruntled. (One of my own techniques here is to tell my true story of "Chickens Beyond the Dreams of Avarice," a tale of how my letter of complaint to Foster Farms about an insufficiently plucked fryer produced a windfall of free chicken coupons.) If we are unable to arouse any sense of rampaging consumerism in that arena, perhaps we can explore the possible frustrations arising from dealing with the academic administration, or maybe even with something as close to home as the appointment system at the Writing Center. Frequently, when students acknowledge a problem of this sort, they will also have discovered both a reason to write and a clearly defined audience to address. Acquiring such knowledge, and discussing its rhetorical implications, allows students once again to focus on those features of their writing that contribute to its effectiveness.

The natural follow-up to such a discussion is, of course, an assignment to write a letter which addresses the
problem. A careful reading of the letter, with special attention to the stylistic choices that the student has made to achieve a particular tone, would follow. Finally, we might, if we are committed to our avowed purpose of making audience an important reality, even provide a stamp for the envelope. Anticipating that their writing may indeed have a purpose, and even a possible payoff, beyond the requirements of getting a grade or passing a course, can be a real eye-opener for many of our students who seem to have come from, or may mistakenly anticipate living in, a post-literate world.

Discussion of the audience for a particular piece of writing can also be helpful for our students when they come to a tutoring session worrying about an impending essay exam—specifically, about the type of holistically graded writing exam being administered more and more often in college writing courses. They know, after all, that, when they are confronted by an essay question on a given subject, and constrained by a time limit in which to answer that question, they do not have the luxury of choosing either their audience or their reason for writing.

We can best address this concern, I believe, by, first of all, pointing out how often they can expect grim necessity to provide the impetus to write, and then by
giving them some guidance on how to take an essay exam. Certainly, if we have achieved the position of writing tutor, we have undoubtedly demonstrated our own ability to handle such a task a number of times. We will frequently discover that an analysis of our own processes in these cases will yield insights that we can share with our students. Unfortunately, as experienced writers, we often internalize these processes, hardly giving them conscious thought once we have mastered them. Furthermore, as graduate students, many writing tutors intern in various writing classes and so have also participated in grading sessions for such tests. This gives us additional insights we can share.

To work with a student in this way, I find it very helpful to have access to sample essay tests from the various writing courses at the university. Instead of just giving one of these tests as an "exercise" in test taking, though, we can use our tutoring time to discuss with students how they would go about taking such a test. When we do so, we may discover that students who do poorly on such tests are leaving out some crucial step in the test-taking process. When I have asked students to outline that process for me as they perceive it, I frequently receive something like this:
1. Read the question

2. Brainstorm (or outline or list ideas)

3. Write the answer

4. Proofread (or revise or correct mistakes)

All too often, the very important business of analyzing the question to determine exactly what is being required of them is not included, or, at least, is not made explicit as a separate step. Of course, it may be argued (and indeed it has been by some of my more articulate students) that this step is implied or included in the reading of the question, but my experience in reading essay exams is that, in many cases, sadly, it is not. If this is where their weakness lies, we can use the sample tests to go through this process with them, becoming for a while tutors in the separate but necessary skill of critical reading.

This is, after all, part of the discovery of who their audience is and thus an important step in moving their work from "writer-based" to "reader-based" prose. We might even make an attempt to answer a particular sample question in writing ourselves, modeling for them the successful strategies we have developed from our own experience in this situation. Experience with the criteria for holistic grading sessions has also made obvious (to me, at any rate)
the importance that graders often attach to the ability of student writers to demonstrate control of those language skills that contribute to a lively and readable style—particularly after those graders have read over fifty essays on the same topic. This, too, is knowledge that we do well to pass on to our students.

If, on the other hand, our discussion uncovers some other problem, such as the failure to leave time for proofreading and the consequent proliferation of correctable errors, we might share some tips on time management or advice on quick-fix revision skills. If, as writing tutors, we do not possess a well-rounded knowledge of what the writing instructor as audience expects in this situation, we should make it our business to acquire it forthwith, so that we can pass it on to our students.

Before we leave the subject of audience, it seems only fair to address an aspect of the problem with which we began our discussion: How can we help our students when the audience is, definitely and inescapably, "Dr. ____ , of course"? While it is useful and important to foster a knowledge of the wider audience that exists for their writing, we must remain aware that many of the writing assignments that students bring to the Writing Center must indeed meet the very specific requirements of an instructor
and a set curriculum for a course. We certainly do not want to do our students the disservice of ignoring their concern with "getting it right." So we may need to prod our students gently in the obvious direction: if they are not sure about what their instructors require, they may need to go back and ask for clarification. Sometimes, all it takes is a little reassurance that there really are no stupid questions. Occasionally, when this fails, when the student either won't go because of excessive anxiety, or returns still confused and unable to clearly articulate the assignment, we may even consider consulting with the teacher ourselves. The collaboration of tutor, instructor, and student that sometimes results can be a very rewarding one, not just for the student, but also for the tutor and, perhaps, even for the teacher of the course.

Talking about Stylistic Choices

Once the importance of knowing their audience has been firmly established in our students' minds, we are better able to discuss the stylistic choices they make in their writing, first at the level of the word, later at the level of the phrase, (where we deal with cliches and other overused constructions), and finally at the sentence level
(where we can discuss how arrangement of sentence elements contributes to clarity, emphasis, coherence and so forth).

For some reason, the writing that many students do in college takes on a strange, uneven cadence. Perhaps this results from the sudden exposure, in their reading requirements for various courses, to a higher quality of language usage than they are accustomed to, and the attempt to incorporate such usage into their own work. Sometimes, such writing shows signs that the giant beast, the Thesaurus, has gone galumphing through it, leaving its spoor of oddly inappropriate, multisyllabic synonyms for simple words. At other times, the specialized language of some particular discipline intrudes, as jargon, in their work. Occasionally, the difficulty is an imperfect understanding of the word's meaning, either a confusion with another word to which it is closely related, or an unlooked for connotation.

These attempts by students to increase and expand their vocabularies are laudable, and we should encourage them. To this end, we might point out that even experienced writers make such mistakes occasionally. The following recent news item in the The San Bernardino Sun shows what happened to a noted author when he tried to stretch a simile beyond his masculine ken:

- 50 -
PLAYWRITING IS LIKE PREGNANCY? CAMDEN, N.J.

--Playwright Edward Albee compares the creative process to being pregnant. "I discover one day that I am "with play," he told a group of Rutgers University students. "I'm never aware of the moment of gestation." Albee gave eight lectures last month to a playwriting workshop at the school's Camden campus, sharing tips and critiquing the work of thirteen students. (A2)

We can perhaps forgive Edward Albee for not knowing that, while conception can occur in a moment, gestation is usually a much longer process. In fact, we can probably assume that the mistake occurred more through carelessness than ignorance. It is important to note, however, that the effect of such an error is to divert attention from the meaning of Albee's words while we alternatively puzzle over or laugh at his usage. So, when our students' work displays such difficulties, we probably need to do some intensive work with them on recognizing the importance of the precise meanings of words, or their connotations, or the various levels of diction from which writers must choose. They need to know that such choices are indeed theirs to make, and to understand how consideration of audience and occasion must influence those decisions. An example of student work (Appendix, Sample 1) illustrates some of these problems.
Certainly, we can find many different problems with this piece of writing--difficulties with organization, illogical transitions, confusion about punctuation, and considerable ignorance about the chosen courtroom setting. Why, then, would it be appropriate to begin our tutorial effort by concentrating on word choice? Well, we have to begin somewhere, and, particularly in this essay, diction seems an excellent place to start, because the student has already demonstrated that while confusion exists about how to manipulate language to achieve particular effects, there is also awareness of, and interest in, the possibilities that a rich vocabulary provides.

David Bartholomae suggests a further rationale for including examination of apparent errors of choice in a process-oriented approach to improving writing style when he discusses why we look at them:

Error analysis begins with a theory of writing, a theory of language production and language development, that allows us to see errors as evidence of choice or strategy among a range of possible choices or strategies. They provide evidence of an individual style of using the language and making it work; they are not a simple record of what a writer failed to do because of incompetence or indifference. Errors then,
are stylistic features, information about this writer and this language; they are not necessarily "noise" in the system, accidents of composing, or malfunctions in the language process. (255)

How might we find the underlying strategy for making the language work in this student's essay? My own procedure with him was to begin by jotting down words as we read through the essay together, words that sounded odd, inappropriate, or out of place. I produced the following list: commenced, quoted, suddenly, cross section of society, fast food establishment, preoccupied, conjugal, aggregate, edibles, latent functions, consume, substances, symbolize, termination, vociferously, private sector. In the conversation that ensued, we discussed reasons for choosing those words and what the words did for me as the audience of the moment. I told the student that I was particularly intrigued by the use of the word "quoted" and I wanted to know where it came from and what it was doing here in a twentieth-century courtroom. The student told me that it meant "said," that it was used to avoid "doing the same things the same way over and over again," and it sounded like a good word for a courtroom. My queries about the other words evoked the response that writing should be different every time.
This writer was certainly already aware of the mind-numbing effect of writing that was boring or unimaginative and had already taken steps to avoid that danger. The student had not, however, sufficiently considered audience; it was enough to satisfy a need for variety without too much regard for how the work would be understood by others. We then looked up "quoth" in the dictionary. The student seemed surprised that it couldn't take the "ed" ending and was confused by the notation "archaic"; Such things had been ignored as not being important. We looked up "archaic." When we discussed some of the other word choices, "conjugal" and "aggregate," for example, the student mentioned that they were taken from a course in sociology. After talking a little bit about sociology, the student decided to change "latent functions" to "latent dysfunctions." We talked about how such use of a specialized vocabulary might affect a reader. What exactly was a latent dysfunction anyway? And if a lawyer were to use jargon, would he or she be more likely to use legalese? And how would that affect the reader? How did jargon serve this student's purpose in writing the essay, and what was that purpose anyway? In short, we talked quite a lot about how words work, and how to recognize it when they are not working the way we want them to. By focusing on stylistic choices at this level, one might say that this student
became aware of the latent dysfunctions of words.

When working through their own word choice problems is not sufficient to bring students to a clear understanding of the importance of diction, some exercises in recognizing its different levels, and in discriminating among the subtle shades of meaning of various synonyms can be helpful. It might be necessary to work also on the distinction between abstract and concrete language, discussing how using specific words can change writing that tells into writing that shows what it means. Most writing handbooks include such exercises in their sections on vocabulary or diction, or tutors can design them to suit their needs. For example, to continue working on diction with the student whose work is discussed above, Shaughnessy's suggestions for substitution exercises (222) seemed particularly suitable, so I chose a couple of passages from short stories by different authors, then took several words from each and, with the help of a thesaurus, compiled lists of synonyms for them. (By concentrating on verbs in the exercise, we were also able to focus on how important it is to get the real action of the sentence in its proper position as the predicate.) We then discussed what shifts in meaning, if any, occurred as each new synonym was substituted for the original. This exercise is in the appendix (Exercise 2).
When we discuss the importance of diction in developing a sense of style, we often encounter great difficulty in teaching our students how to recognize overused, ineffective phraseology in their own writing. The temptation to use cliché-ridden language is an insidious one, simply because clichés seem to be universal referents: everyone is familiar with them, so they look to students like a way to bypass the struggle to express themselves and slip comfortably into a well-worn groove of meaning. What could be simpler? How better to fulfill the requirement to be clear than to use a tried and true expression?

Sometimes it's helpful to point out to students that clichés, like "tried and true" for instance, are really not as apropos as they might seem when they first come rolling out of the mind. Certainly, in this case, the expression is "tried"--it is, after all, a cliche--but what makes it "true"? Are we really talking here about truth, that gigantic moral concept? And, if not, what good does it do my writing to have it in there? May we ignore it as unimportant, and, if we do, may we not assume that the writer who uses it is not particularly careful about meaning? If that is the case, then the entire discourse is suspect; credibility is lost. Such reasoning can bring students back to those central questions of why they are writing and who they are writing for, questions which, when
our overriding purpose is to focus upon style, can never be far from their consciousness.

Another approach might be to help students to see that many of the expressions they employ are metaphors that were probably once examples of fresh and lively language; that is indeed how they found their way into the cultural mainstream. But the nature of language is constantly to change; each utterance is a new combination from among virtually limitless possibilities. So it is unnatural, in a sense, to try to recycle such expressions; it is as if, by some semantic voodoo, we have brought them back to lurch, zombie-like, through our own pages. Their original vitality is gone and the semblance of life that remains is in fact quite ugly to the discerning eye. Such a fate is too horrible for words and, when we find them functioning this way, simple human kindness requires that we lay them once again to rest.

Still at the level of the phrase, a slightly different problem occurs when students fill their papers with, well, fillers — phrases that have no apparent purpose other than to take up paper space and reader time. Once again, the kind of writing to which they are exposed in college may be partly responsible. Academic writing is full of this sort of thing, so I think we as tutors or as teachers must
acknowledge that we ourselves are not immune to the impulse to pad and overwrite, and treat this flaw in student writing with sympathy. Treat it, though, we must, not only because we deserve to atone for our own past sins in this area, but, more importantly, because our students are frequently unaware that they are doing it at all. Often excess words just fill the spaces that students have between their thoughts. The redundancy of such phrases as "the reason for this is that" or "at the time when this occurred" seem to be akin to such verbal tics as "umm," "like," or "you know."

At other times, repetition of the same words or phrases indicates the writers have not really thought very deeply about their subjects and are using excess verbiage to cover up the fact that they really have very little to say. Another piece of student writing illustrates this difficulty (Appendix, Sample 2). In this essay, written for an English 95 assignment, the writer was trying to fulfill a requirement to write about something that was "either a blessing or a curse." Herewith, the opening paragraph:

Dormitory living is of great benefit. I find it very beneficial to live in the dorms. Without the facility of the dorms, many people would have to drive back and forth just to go to college. Another reason why I find it beneficial to live in dorms is so that I don't have
to cook. I find it very hard to cook and I am no expert at it. Another beneficial fact about the dorms is that, I'm more involved and I've met a lot of new friends.

To an experienced writer, the solution to this problem paragraph is so obvious that a tutor is tempted to simply offer it in a succinct sentence or two, something like: "I enjoy dorm living because I'm close to classes, free of the difficulties of cooking chores, and surrounded by new friends."

It may be unfair though, to simply point out to students the places where their writing suffers from triteness or excessive wordiness unless we are able at the same time to train them to recognize for themselves what they are doing and why. In this case, I asked the student to reread this paragraph aloud to me, then I read it back. Each time, I asked the student if there were any problems. The first time, the student studied it carefully, and finally asked if the comma in the last sentence was needed. The second time, when I asked if there were any problems, the student at first said that there were not and then, reconsidering, allowed, "Maybe it's kind of repetitious." We talked about looking at repetition as a clue to the problem of excessive verbiage. We then went quickly through
the next three paragraphs, which expand on, in turn, the advantages of not having to drive, not having to cook, and being involved with friends—while living in the dorms.

Then, the closing paragraph:

As you can see, it is an advantage to be living in the dorms. One don't have to wake up early and drive back and forth. One don't cook their own meals and then clean the dishes. Finally, you get to be more involved and live as one big family.

In writing like this, we can see how, even when our students are still involved with the process of invention, trying to discover what they have to say, we can help them by focusing their attention on style. This student's paper really had not gone beyond the prewriting stage of searching for a subject, and the repetition pointed to the fact that one had not yet been found. Looking closely at this repetition also led to an awareness of the generalized repetitiveness of ideas throughout the paper. At some point, the student had evidently heard and taken quite seriously the prescription to "say what you are going to say, say it, and say what you said." The conversation we had indicated a belief in that dictum which somehow legitimized this attempt to cover up a paucity of content.

Such are the pitfalls of formulaic teaching -- or
formulaic learning. I asked why dormitory living was the subject when there seemed so little to say about it, and was told that it was one of the suggestions for a topic developed during a classroom brainstorming session. It became apparent that no amount of successive rewriting would rescue this subject from wordy dullness because the student really did not want to write about it at all. We did a little more brainstorming and came up with a list of seven things that the student either did or didn't like, things like bumper stickers, MTV, the food at the Commons, his sister. I asked the student to read Paul Roberts' classic essay, "How to Say Nothing in Five Hundred Words," and suggested particular attention to Roberts' advice that taking the less usual side of an argument often leads to better writing. At the next session, this student showed me an essay that argued that female children were a curse and should be kept in boxes until they were old enough to marry. It was paranoid, but it wasn't dull. Thus a focus on the style of the writing led to a whole new discovery of intent and a complete change in content. Lanham's remarks about the interaction between process and product seem particularly applicable here. This student's writing improved dramatically with the discovery of what not to say and its replacement with what could be said gracefully.

After we have spent some time with our students on how
much of a person's writing style is determined at the levels of word and phrase, and how important it is to be aware that all the words we use are effective in some way, for good or ill, we can consider how the kind of style writers want to project dictates the form, the sophistication, and even the punctuation of the sentences they use. This idea is well expressed in Simard and Stone's chapter on sentences in The Whole Writer's Catalog. Their discussion of style at the sentence level and "stylistic punctuation, the traffic signals of...prose," includes several examples of how the proper use of sentence structures is not only rule governed but purpose governed as well. They also offer clear and readable guidelines for determining when the importance of achieving a particular effect might take precedence over the rule for, say, writing complete sentences, or avoiding comma splices (119–137).

Unfortunately, it is easy to get bogged down in terminology when dealing with sentences, and, as soon as students hear us say "compound-complex sentence" or "restrictive versus nonrestrictive clause," their eyes glaze over and roll up into their heads. It is very difficult to do useful work with a student in this condition. Furthermore, the traditional labels of simple, complex, compound, and compound-complex can actually cause some confusion when working with students' writing, because real
sentences, as opposed to workbook sentences, do not always fit neatly within the parameters of these models. Moreover, the faint-hearted can be confounded when the compound-complexity of a sentence, like "I'll come and I'll go as I please," is juxtaposed with the simplicity of a well-wrought cumulative sentence like the following example from Ernest Hemingway: "George was coming down in the telemark position, kneeling, one leg forward and bent, the other trailing, his sticks hanging like some insect's thin legs, kicking up puffs of snow, and finally the whole kneeling, trailing figure coming around in a beautiful right curve, crouching, the legs shot forward and back, the body leaning out against the swing, the sticks accenting the curves like points of light, all in a wild cloud of snow" (qtd. in Christiansen, 193).

While we may be able to avoid these difficulties by downplaying the importance of labeling sentences in the traditional way, we do need a terminology to discuss them, because an understanding of how sentences are put together, of the dynamics of subordination and coordination, is essential to an understanding of what makes an effective writing style. We need to be able to make clear, for example, that what happens to two ideas in a complex sentence is quite different from what would happen to the same two ideas in a compound sentence, or that a verb,
nominalized and stuck inside a prepositional phrase, does not behave at all like a predicate. In the third section of the Preface to *Style*, Joseph Williams sternly addresses the problem of dealing with students who are underprepared for the advanced terminology that a fruitful discussion of style may demand:

I confess I am a bit puzzled that any teacher would object to a discussion that introduces terms that a student does not know but should. I have always assumed that we are in the business of teaching students what they do not know, and that if they do not know what subject, verb, predicate, object, and so on mean, then we tell them. I don't see how we can avoid using some terminology, even new terminology, any more than a physicist can avoid using new terms such as lepton, quark, or charmed particle in a textbook on the fundamental structure of matter.

Certainly we as tutors are also in the same business, and Williams's exhortations can inspire us to add our expertise in the more sophisticated sentence structures—Cooper's multiple embeddings, Christiansen's cumulative sentences, Walker's parallelism—to whatever our students already know. To do so, sentence-combining
exercises can be an effective tool. Winterowd writes of how important it is for students to develop this syntactic fluency which he defines as "nothing more than the ability to use the syntactic resources of the language to embed proposition within proposition within proposition...."

Without it students can remain stuck at a very basic writing level, barely able to formulate their ideas into simple sentences, and so unable to move on to the larger tasks of thesis development and overall organization of those ideas into an acceptable format (204).

Because linguistics studies have brought the concept of syntactic fluency to such prominence in composition circles, we can probably find plenty of sentence-combining exercises in whatever writing workbook our students have access to, or we may want to design some of our own, using the student's work, when possible, as a starting point. It's important to realize, though, that the effectiveness of such exercises is greatly enhanced when we work with our students in doing them. We may function as "models" in this way, talking about why we make particular rhetorical choices and then comparing ours and theirs, not with an eye to discovering which is "best," but rather with the intention of seeing how emphasis and even meaning can change as different sentence elements take different positions.
Here, indeed, we can demonstrate how closely bound are form and content; this is where style and meaning can be seen to meet. It becomes especially obvious if we set up a series of sentences so that they include a positive, a negative, and a neutral statement about a subject; students frequently become excited about designing their own sentences for combining, with ever more outrageous juxtapositions. In fact, it often turns into a game, and, for students interested in improving writing style, and for tutors committed to helping them do so, work can finally become play—wordplay.

This sense of play is inherent in the composing process; it is indeed what Lanham alludes to when he writes that "style must be taught for and as what it is—a pleasure, a grace, a joy, a delight." But writing isn't playing with oneself (although I might have a little private and personal fun with that last phrase); it's really playing with one's audience. This brings us back finally to where this practicum, and where any discussion of style must begin and end. Winston Weathers writes that "we should confirm for our students that style has something to do with better communication.... But going beyond this... we should also say that style is the proof of a human being's individuality... that indeed our manner is part of our message" (326). When we can show our students that style is
important because it adds to their communication of information the revelation of who they are, and when we can convince them that their audience both requires and revels in that epiphany, we will have achieved our twofold goal: we will have both defended the relevance of the study of style and given them a means of achieving it.
APPENDIX

EXERCISE 1

Imagine yourself in the following situation: You have just picked up your car after having three hundred dollars worth of scheduled maintenance work performed on it in accordance with your warranty agreement. Considerably poorer, but confident that everything under the hood is checked, adjusted, and humming along nicely, you head for a remote mountain cabin for a weekend of snow, solitude, and cross-country skiing. Halfway there, and miles from the nearest phone, your car overheats and, in a cloud of steaming antifreeze, you grind to a halt. You lift the hood to discover that someone at the dealership where you had your car serviced had neglected to replace the radiator cap and your car has boiled dry.

Assume now that you do not die of exposure on the mountainside, but instead eventually make your way back to civilization. Based on this scenario, choose two of the following writing tasks:

Write a letter to a friend (boyfriend? girlfriend?) recounting your harrowing experience.

Write a letter home to your parents telling what happened and explaining why you need extra money this month to pay for repair of a cracked engine block.

Write to the dealership whose shop serviced your car, asking that they reimburse you for the towing charges, car repair costs, overnight accommodations at the Arrowhead Lodge, and car rental costs you accumulated while your car was being fixed.

Write a letter to your uncle's oldest son, your cousin the lawyer, to find out if you have grounds for a lawsuit.
EXERCISE 2

WHAT’S THE GOOD WORD?

The old people sat on the bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To and fro, in front of the flower beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to buy a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railings. Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny staggerer came rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down "flop" until its small, high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and — Miss Brill had often noticed — there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even — even cupboards! From "Miss Brill" by Katherine Mansfield

sat  squatted, roosted, perched
ran  raced, darted, galloped, fled
stared gaped, gazed, looked, watched
rushed hurried, hastened, sped
EXERCISE 2 (cont'd)

We flushed a covey of quail under a high clay bank with overhanging brush and I killed two as they went out of sight over the top of the bank. Some of the covey lit in trees but most of them scattered into brush piles and it was necessary to jump on the ice-coated mounds of brush several times before they would flush. Coming out while you were poised unsteadily on the icy, springy brush they made difficult shooting and I killed two, missed five, and started back pleased to have found a covey close to the house and happy there were so many left to find on another day. from "A Day's Wait" by Ernest Hemingway

- killed slaughtered, butchered, destroyed, bumped off
- scattered disseminated, dispersed, flew away, went off
- jump leap, spring, bound, vault, hurdle
- pleased delighted, gratified, satisfied, fulfilled, happy
The plaintiff had just commenced condemning the owner of the fast food establishment for selling unhealthy food to the public. The state appointed health inspector was ruthless in his closing statements, but now the defendant had his opportunity to salvage his business. The defendant's attorney arose, suddenly, to convey his thoughts to the cross-section of society. He then proceeded, with authority, in attempting to sway the jury, by stating the importance of the fast food establishment in the modern society "the kids of the neighborhood," he quothed, "depend on the jobs the business creates." Therefore, giving them the opportunity to better acquire the needed experience that would aid them in future job ventures. In addition, it would keep the innocent children from being enticed by the harsh world into mischief. For example, most young adults that eat fast food are not preoccupied with the quality of the food, but rather attempt to find a suitable environment to better develop their personality. On top of that, he went on to say, "if it was not for the fast food establishment, most youths would be forced to eat alone." Perhaps, with only the microwave for company, the attorney began to pace in front of the jurors before he entered the second phase of his attack. "Society," he quothed, "has a need for such services to be rendered to better function." For example, the conjugal family has not the time to aggregate for their feasts, therefore they need the semi-nutritious edibles the fast food establishment provides not only does it have functional value, but it may serve as one of the rite of passage children seek to prove themselves. For example, it is well known that one of the latent functions of school is that of prolonging immaturity. Thus the business would also provide "mature" individuals that in turn would contribute more to society. The well spoken lawyer attorney then smiled at the jurors, and with a humorous tone began to say, "What possible harm can come from the occasional indulgence people have for fast foods." However, people that consume the substances must be also aware of the quality of the food, by the economical prices of the fast foods. For example, a person may eat
lunch for under five dollars at the fast food establishment, while the restaurants would cost substantially more. Therefore, not only does it provide a suitable environment for socialization, but it is also quite economical. The attorney then sat down to symbolize to the judge of his termination of words. The judge then, vociferously, began to render the decision of the jury. "The jury" she quothed, "has taken into consideration: the benefits to society, to the job market, and to the economical pricing of the business." "However, we find that anyone within the private sector must provide the best "possible" products for the public." she quothed. Therefore, she ordered the defendant to close his business.
Dormitory living is of great benefit. I find it very beneficial to live in the dorms. Without the facility of the dorms, many people would have to drive back and forth just to go to college. Another reason why I find it beneficial to live in dorms is so that I don't have to cook. I find it very hard to cook and I am no expert at it. Another beneficial fact about the dorms is that, I'm more involved and I've met a lot of new friends.

I live fifty miles from college, if I were to drive back and forth it would be very frustrating. For one thing, I would definitely have to get up quite early to attend the class on time. If I do that than I would have to go to bed early so I can get the correct amount of sleep. If this was to happen than, I would always be on the run. I wouldn't have time for other activities. Another problem I would run into if I were to drive back and forth is the traffic. When I would drive to college in the morning many people would be going to work so there is a heavy traffic on the freeway. It is not easy to wake up and drive to deal with the traffic. However, if your living in the dorms there is no such problem to deal with. You wouldn't have to get up early since the distance from the dorms to the classes are fifteen minutes away.

Another advantage of the dorms is that I don't know how to cook my food. Its difficult to cook and I don't like cooking one bit. Well when your living in the dorm, you don't have to cook. The food is served three times a day five days a week. The good thing about that is you don't have to wash your dishes.

When your living in the dorm your more involved. For example I'm involved by being on the tennis team and I play intermural basketball, volleyball and I will be playing softball in the spring. I get to be more active when I'm living in the dorms because you can become friends easily and also you have plenty of time. I became friends with alot of people at the dorms because I see them everyday. At the dorms we live as a big
family.

As you can see, it is an advantage to be living in the dorms. One don't have to wake up early and drive back and forth. One don't have to cook their own meals and then clean the dishes. Finally you get to be more involved and live as one big family.
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