

COMP NOTES • COMP NOTES • COMP NOTES

BOOK REVIEWS

Physical Eloquence and the Biology of Writing — Robert S. Ochsner; State University of New York Press, Albany; 1990; 223 pp. ISBN 0-7914-0313-0.

Instead of decrying the decline in literacy, Ochsner introduces a new concept of literacy — physical eloquence resulting from the biological processes of writing. Accordingly, his approach is to teach writing as acquisition of prose or as foreign language. Ochsner asks us “to consider writing and writing development as if both were primarily a physical — and hence biological — activity,” a sophisticated balancing act of eye, ear, hand and brain, which most college writers have not mastered.

Correcting the cognitive emphasis, which has ignored the fact of students’ bodies, Ochsner calls for awareness of the neurological functions that establish the “kinetic and visual melodies,” which regulate the pace of production, editing, and interpretation, and the “auditory melody” that attunes linguistic form to appropriate register.

To encourage a writing-as-acquisition curriculum, Ochsner calls for “a radical shift in writing instruction” away from writing as thinking toward practice of the physical act of generating the form of language. Grading what ought to be practice writing does very little permanent good. And lapses of several months or semesters in writing practice coupled with writing instruction can result in deterioration of skills to pre-class levels.

According to Ochsner, we shouldn’t spend class time teaching grammar or the metalanguage of prose to communicate about writing. The real subject of a writing class should be writing. Good writers use the “RULES” unconsciously in the production of text. Developing writers should know where to find the rules and learn to apply them as they edit text. I find myself agreeing with Ochsner that prose is acquired and that, if college students haven’t exposed themselves to masses of writing and reading, they can’t operate with fluency of vocabulary and sentence structure.

—Margaret-Rose Marek

Computer-Mediated Communication: Human Relationships in a Computerized World; James W. Chesebro and Donald G. Bonsall; Studies in Rhetoric and Communication — general eds. Clark, McKerrow, and Zarefsky; University of Alabama Press; 275pp. ISBN 0-8173-0460-6.

Going back to 1934 in *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford showed that the tools we use force us to reconceptualize what we do and, once that happens, there’s almost no going back. In essence that is part of the message of *Computer-Mediated Communication*: “we are witnessing nothing less than the computerization of America.” But the rest of the message is that we ought to be aware not only of the personal computer as our new tool, but we must examine carefully how it can come to dominate our conceptions, perceptions, information, knowledge, and ultimately the communications it is supposed to mediate.

From the first chapter calling for an Information Society to the last chapter suggesting we remain skeptical about the value of computers and alert to their potential for enhancing or diminishing our humane attitudes, beliefs and actions, this is a thoughtful and thought-provoking dissection of the computer revolution. Offering no guarantees for humanism in this “rhetorical and critical view of the home personal computer,” the authors make it clear that each of us will decide, actively or passively, how the computer revolution will change our lives.

Chesebro and Bonsall introduce basic concepts in computing, focus on the computer-human relationship, examine the range of possible uses for PCs and the social consequences of those uses, and offer a critical perspective on the role of computerization within the social system. As a technocrat myself, I was reluctant to read what I feared would be another “damn the computer — bless the feather pen” screed. Instead, I was pleased to read a well-documented, reasonable, philosophical venture into the world of personal computing.

—Margaret-Rose Marek

The College Handbook of Creative Writing — Robert DeMaria; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 1991; 359 pp. ISBN 0-15-509040-2.

DeMaria attempts to give beginning creative writers a comprehensive manual to cling to as they develop their craft. The handbook's stated mission is not to dictate *how* to write but to help novices avoid common mistakes. Though it breaks no new ground in fiction theory, the handbook is a good reference and contains some useful classroom exercises. Sample stories, poems, and plays take up nearly half the text but clearly illustrate techniques. Veteran writers may find the definitions of plot, character, and theme simplistic; novices, however, will likely welcome the simplicity. Novices may also find the glossary of terms used by workshop leaders valuable in avoiding embarrassing questions (What do you mean my story is *puerile* and *melodramatic*?).

In separate chapters (1-8), DeMaria deals with theme, setting, character, plot, point of view, tone and style, description, and dialogue. Chapter 9 shows how writers reveal characters' thoughts; Chapter 10 examines methods of establishing time-frames; Chapter 11 contains a good explanation of poetic meter; and Chapter 12 offers advice on formatting manuscripts. In Chapter 13, DeMaria provides a brief grammar/mechanics guide geared toward creative writers, emphasizing that "it is not ordinary *correctness* of language that counts, but aesthetic *effectiveness*." Chapter 14 gives a quick look at writing as a career, including helpful hints on marketing, agents, copyrights, contracts, and taxes.

Workshop leaders should consider recommending their freshman and sophomore students keep this handbook, more useful as a reference than a classroom text, handy on the bookshelf.

— Steve Sherwood

Farlanburg Stories — Lisa Koger; W. W. Norton; 1990; 234 pp. ISBN 0-393-02856-9.

None of the stories in this collection quite rises to the black comic level of, say, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," but the voice of this new Southern writer has a sweet darkness all its own. Set in Farlanburg, a small town somewhere south of the Mason-Dixon line, the stories draw one into the richly troubled lives of people trapped in a cultural backwash. The characters' failed escape attempts and touching efforts, in the face of failure, to salvage their lives fill one with reluctant admiration — and guilty laughter.

Farlanburg's residents have sold out their dreams. But from the betrayals and missed opportunities the best of them have managed to gain, if not happiness or redemption, at least a cautious self-acceptance. So one can relate to Earl, in "Bypass," when the suspicion that his wife no longer loves him surfaces in a craving for fried chicken; to young Dutchi, in "The June Woman," who identifies too closely with a glamorous stranger and loses her innocence; and to widow Evelyn, in "Rabbit in the Foot," who frees herself from the memory of her killjoy husband, Leo — "You're dead...you son of a bitch!" Of the other stories, perhaps the most poignant is "Baby Luv," in which the death of a child brings a quarrelsome family together. For sinful joy, however, Koger's best is "Testimony," in which Eunice confesses at a revival meeting how she betrayed her innocent younger sister into the arms of a "slope-shouldered, bushy-browed" hog of a man and found Christ.

—Steve Sherwood

Me and Brenda — Philip Israel; W. W. Norton; 1990; 223 pp. ISBN 0-393-02860-7.

The latest of the New York scam novels, this improbable tale of a cab driver's adventures with a fast-talking swindler parallels Israel's seduction of the reader. Like the characters, who believe con man Al Croppe even when they know he's lying, we swallow Israel's fable. As Russ, the cabbie, tells Croppe's first victim, "Your only chance is that Croppe is telling you the truth when he says you'll come out of it clean. So my advice...is don't do anything. Wait and see." And so on the strength of Israel's voice and our affection for his characters, we go along for the ride, horrified at our own credulity yet hoping in the end to come out clean.

The unlikely plot revolves around Croppe's scheme to defraud an Atlantic City casino. To accomplish this, he corrupts a young businessman and, step by step, makes him desperate enough to pass bad checks. Croppe eventually gets away with the casino's money and leaves the young man on the hook. Although appalled at his young friend's gullibility, Russ later falls victim to the same swindle. "I know Al Croppe is a liar, a con man, and everything else," Russ says, but he can't turn down his one chance to make big money. The scheme works, and Croppe predictably cons Russ out of his share. "I knew this would happen," Russ admits. "In the back of my mind I knew it all along." And so do we, though we continue to read in the naive hope that it won't.

This is Israel's first novel. Like Al Croppe's victims, in the event Israel writes a sequel, we're sure to come back for more.

—Steve Sherwood

The Writing Teacher as Researcher: Essays in the Theory and Practice of Class-Based Research— ed. Donald A. Daiker and Max Morenberg; Boynton/Cook, Heinemann; 1990; 357pp. ISBN 0-86709-255-6.

The twenty-five essays in this collection were originally presented at the Third Miami University Conference on the Teaching of Writing in 1988. Although the volume is divided into sections called "The Theory of Teacher Research" and "The Practice of Teacher Research," the labels prove unreliable: the articles about theory are concerned with practical application, while those about practice almost always articulate the theories underlying the given practice. This healthy balance typifies the willingness of these writers to deal with praxis, that messy middle ground between theory and practice where writing teachers spend their professional lives. That balance, in fact, makes this anthology a useful and worthwhile contribution to the field.

As with all such compilations, some essays prove more satisfying than others. Richard C. Gebhardt's admonition to test research results against our own practice and observations is an obvious but welcome reminder of the difficulty in the practical application of theoretical concerns. A number of essays in the second portion of the book seem to heed that warning. The collection opens with James Berlin's exciting overview of the work on the political dimensions of the teacher as researcher, and Diana George's "The Struggle with Empowerment," which points out the ways that the system militates against dissent despite our frequent concern for empowerment, seems a sobering echo of Berlin's optimistic report.

Of particular interest to teachers using collaborative learning are the papers by Kathleen Geissler and Thia Wolf about authority structures in peer editing groups. Those who teach literature or technical writing will find several useful articles in sections devoted to these disciplines, while teachers of all sorts should be challenged and encouraged by Nancy Grimm's "Tutoring Dyslexic College Students."

Because the papers address teacher research at all levels of education, some of the essays will prove of less interest to readers of FEN for that reason. A few other essays seem out of place in the collection: although their names lend prestige to the volume, Edward P. J. Corbett's recommendation that students write history and Donald M. Murray's "How the Text Instructs" both appear to have little connection with "The Theory of Teacher Research" section in which they are placed. Nevertheless, the collection as a whole is welcome for the many insights this research brings.

—Joe Law

Gender in the Classroom: Power and Pedagogy— eds. Susan L. Gabriel and Isaiah Smithson; University of Illinois Press; 1990; 196 pp. ISBN 0-252-06110-1.

This collection of ten essays identifies two persistent weaknesses in Women's Studies and curriculum integration programs: the lack of valid and reliable research on gender and learning and the difficulties of transforming gender research into classroom practices. Boasting of contributors from the fields of literature, linguistics, rhetoric, and education, some of the essays focus on composition, most address reading and interpretation, and all explore the subtle play of power within the issues of gender and pedagogy.

Carolyn Heilbrun's opening essay, "The Politics of Mind: Women, Tradition, and the University," provides an overview into the gender/pedagogy dilemma and acts as a touchstone for the remaining essays. Focusing on reading and interpretation within the classroom, the next three essays explore the unconscious use of power by traditional teachers and the problems encountered by feminist teachers consciously attempting to mediate power positions. Balanced against these writings is Robert Con Davis's analysis of the very concept of opposition to power in "Woman as Oppositional Reader: Cixous on Discourse." The remainder of the text can be broken into two general groups: essays focusing on student writings and teacher evaluations, and those discussing direct means for overcoming sexism in education.

Gender in the Classroom essentially argues for an awareness of the problems inherent in current gender pedagogy and research; it merits our attention primarily because it addresses the gender-based deficiencies of and power conflicts within university education, not because of any startling new scholarship or proposed solutions. It draws its strength from previously published essays by Heilbrun, Con Davis, Nina Baym, and Elizabeth Flynn, all strategically placed within the collection, and one new essay by Penny L. Burge and Steven M. Culver, "Sexism, Legislative Power, and Vocational Education."

— Colleen M. Tremonte

The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction—Barnaby Conrad and the Staff of the Santa Barbara Writers' Conference; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 309 pp. ISBN 0-89879-395-5.

Creating Characters: How to Build Story People — Dwight V. Swain; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 195 pp. ISBN 0-89879-417-X.

Make Your Words Count: Proven Techniques for Effective Writing for Fiction and Nonfiction — Gary Provost; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 296 pp. ISBN 0-89879-418-8.

Creative Conversations: The Writer's Complete Guide to Conducting Interviews — Michael Schumacher; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 236 pp. ISBN 0-89879-396-3.

Cosmic Critiques: How & Why Ten Science Fiction Stories Work — Martin Greenburg and Isaac Asimov; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 197 pp. ISBN 0-89879-394-7.

How to Write & Sell Your First Novel—Oscar Collier and Frances Spatz Leighton; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 234 pp. ISBN 0-89879-404-8.

Writer's Digest Handbook of Magazine Article Writing—ed. Jean M. Fredette; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 246 pp. ISBN 0-89879-328-9.

The Writer's Complete Crime Reference Book—Martin Roth; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 306 pp. ISBN 0-89879-397-1.

Armed and Dangerous: A Writer's Guide to Weapons — Michael Newton; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 186 pp. ISBN 0-89879-370-X.

Deadly Doses: A Writer's Guide to Poisons — Serita Deborah Stevens and Anne Klarner; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 298 pp. ISBN 0-89879-371-8.

How to Write a Book Proposal—Michael Larsen; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 113 pp. ISBN 0-89879-419-6.

Business & Legal Forms for Authors & Self-Publishers—Tad Crawford; Allworth Press (Writer's Digest Books); 1990; 176 pp. ISBN 0-927629-03-8.

1991 Writer's Market: Where & How to Sell What You Write—ed. Glenda Tennant Neff; Writer's Digest Books; 1990; 993 pp. ISBN 89879-422-6.

Those who are familiar with Writer's Digest Books only through the annual *Writer's Market* will be pleased to discover that this press also publishes an extensive and impressive range of books relating to the craft of writing well. The approach taken in these volumes is to emphasize the how-to aspect of writing creatively and also of marketing what one writes. The pragmatic discussions are clear, insightful, and direct, replete with examples, discussions, and commentary — making *Writer's Digest* books excellent candidates for creative writing courses, as well as for all individuals interested in writing well and successfully.

The Complete Guide To Writing Fiction and Cosmic Critiques: How & Why Ten Science Fiction Stories Work exemplify the approach of *Writer's Digest* volumes in drawing upon the experiences, personal reflections, and philosophical perspectives of writers who have excelled at their craft.

The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction is composed of chapters that center upon some aspect of writing and publishing fiction, such as "Characters Will Make Your Story," "Theme, Thesis, Moral, or Premise," or "Rejection — and Dejection." Each of the chapters, in turn, keynotes a particular author who discusses his or her experiences and expertise in that area. Eudora Welty, for example, discusses "Making Your Characters Work for You," Harlan Ellison focuses on "Show, Don't Tell," and Ray Bradbury gives advice on "The Be-Getting of an Agent." In all, twenty-five authors are featured, representing both high literary achievement and established commercial success. Their insights into the creative process are fascinating, and their down-to-earth advice is immensely valuable for getting a sense of how successful writing is achieved. In ad-

dition, each chapter perceptively analyzes passages from published works and indicates how the passages achieve their aims. For this aspect alone, the text would prove valuable for beginning writers in creative writing classes.

In **Cosmic Critiques**, ten science fiction stories are presented, representing such diverse forms as "hard science fiction," "cyberpunk," "superscience," "social satires," "alien life forms," "historical science fiction," and "techno-fiction." Each of the ten stories presented is a well-crafted piece, representative of its genre; and each story is followed by a commentary that critiques the structure of the story and the story's achievement. This volume would make an excellent choice for classes on science fiction literature for the quality of the stories alone; the commentary sections add insight and also would qualify this volume for creative writing classes devoted to this genre.

Creating Characters: How to Build Story People, **Creative Conversations: The Writer's Complete Guide to Conducting Interviews**, and **Writer's Digest Handbook of Magazine Article Writing** are volumes devoted to analyzing component parts of the writing process, particularly characterization and a sense of voice in fiction and non-fiction writing.

Creating Characters emphasizes dialogic structures, viewpoint characters, the world within the character, the nature of a character's role within the story, and creating backgrounds for characters. The style of this volume, as with all *Writer's Digest* books, is "user friendly" in the sense of succinct, accessible, and illuminating.

Creative Conversations also emphasizes characterization as a key component of the interviewing process by

focusing on how to research background information, write personality profiles, and develop question and answer interviews. Additional information on the how-to aspect is provided by Barbara Walters and Mike Wallace, who share their personal interviewing techniques. Helpful advice on editing the final draft and on the legal and ethical aspects of interviewing rounds out this most effective and engaging book. As Schumacher states, "Well-chosen words, stated precisely and eloquently, are your goal as an interviewer. As you learn to make art out of someone's remarks, to use conversation to creatively communicate ideas, then you will be a successful writer."

The Writer's Digest Handbook of Magazine Article Writing details writing and marketing instruction on a panoply of types of magazine articles — How-To, As-Told-To, True Life, Seasonal, Personal Experience, Celebrity Profile, and others. While the primary focus of this text is for the freelancer, writers at all levels will benefit from the sensible advice and from the volume's capacity to deconstruct the elements of each magazine article genre.

Make Your Words Work is an instructive guide to the editing process that would be of value in a freshman or advanced composition class, as well as in a journalism or creative writing class. Practical advice and clear-cut examples are given on creating and maintaining unity, avoiding weak and wasted words, making the written word pleasing to the ear, and speaking to the reader in his or her own language. The emphasis is upon "writing that works...writing that does the job it's supposed to do, whether that job is to inform, entertain, anger, or instruct." Since teaching the concept of style is a major portion of our work as composition instructors, **Make Your Words Work**, which valorizes originality, credibility, and readability might prove a helpful tool for composition courses — especially for the range of examples it provides of edited versions of selected passages.

Another important aspect of **Writer's Digest Books** is a focus on marketing one's writing, and here **How to Write a Book Proposal**, **How to Write & Sell Your First Novel**, and **Business & Legal Forms for Authors & Self-Publishers** are excellent guides to the intricacies of market success.

How to Write a Book Proposal focuses on testing the market potential of an idea, preparing a succinct precis of the work, developing an effective cover letter, and choosing the best editor or publisher. Advice on chapter-by-chapter outlines, sample chapters, and submitting one's proposal in a professional manner is also included.

How to Write & Sell Your First Novel takes a three-part approach to marketing one's first novel by providing writing instruction, market advice, and actual case histories of writers who have succeeded in selling their first novels. The purpose of the volume is to assist fledgling novelists through the professional and emotional challenges of getting published by debunking some of the myths that surround first publication and by empowering writers to believe in their abilities and to develop a realistic sense of the marketplace.

Business & Legal Forms for Authors & Self-Publishers provides seventeen ready-to-use forms for every business need, from confirming an assignment to registering a copyright, and seventeen negotiation checklists for

assuring that one gets the best deal. Since contracts and negotiations are seldom a writer's strong point or primary interest, this book, with its complete set of business and legal forms, including sample contracts, should prove invaluable in addressing major issues in this area and providing cogent advice.

The Writer's Complete Crime Reference Book, **Deadly Doses: A Writer's Guide to Poisons**, and **Armed and Dangerous: A Writer's Guide to Weapons** are examples of volumes dedicated to assistance within a specific genre or literary form — in this case, detective and crime novels. The crime reference book enables the writer to ensure that the facts and information in his or her crime story are accurate. Areas covered include the fundamentals of investigation, policies and procedures of law-enforcement agencies, criminal motives, escape methods, weapons, rules of evidence, and current "slanguage" commonly used by criminals and by the police. Information on the professional criminal, organized crime, law enforcement, courtroom procedures, and the military justice system is also provided — together with extensive charts on narcotics and drug addiction. **Armed and Dangerous** and **Deadly Doses** continue the focus on crime and mystery writing by providing detailed and extensive information on firearms and poisons. Both volumes contain illustrations, charts, and diagrams that clarify all aspects of how crimes can be committed with weapons or deadly chemicals, plants, fungi, insects, and pesticides. The comprehensiveness of both volumes is appealing, and both make for fascinating and entertaining reading. The overall achievement of each volume is to save the writer hundreds of hours of research on these topics and to assure that any information about poisons or weapons a writer includes in a story is accurate.

And no review of **Writer's Digest Books** would be complete without mention of the classic **Writer's Market**. The 1991 edition focuses on names, addresses, and short descriptions of 4,000 places that publish articles, short stories, novels, plays, movie scripts, and books. The information is grouped by generic categories, such as Literary and "Little" Magazines, Contemporary Culture, Nature, Conservation and Ecology, Detective and Crime, Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror, etc., so that writers can easily find a grouping of publications that appeal to the same market or target population of readers. In addition, an alphabetical index enables one to look up information on a particular publication quickly. Opening essays for the volume provide discussions of "The Business of Writing" and a "Writer's Roundtable" designed to answer questions for beginning writers on writing and market strategies. The key quality of this work, as with all **Writer's Digest Books**, is comprehensiveness. **Writer's Market** covers all aspects of manuscript submission, and there is not a more encyclopedic text on the market that will guide the writer from development of a manuscript to its publication.

Writing from the Margins: Power and Pedagogy for Teachers of Composition — Carolyn Ericksen Hill; Oxford University Press; 1990; 284 pp. ISBN 0-19-506185-3.

The immediate purpose of Hill's book is to help student writers "confront belief systems different from their own" (9), and thereby help them practice writing which broadens intellectual inquiry (what Hill calls "double-", as opposed to "single-loop" learning). The classroom can become a place where students find the courage to negotiate with other voices and between belief systems while they find their own voices, but only when teachers learn to encourage such interchanges. As composition teachers, Hill contends, we need to be aware of how the roles we describe to our students for ourselves may actually be different from the roles we adopt; such inconsistencies create an atmosphere detrimental to our students' willingness to openly engage with their and others' writing.

Hill's complimentary method, which at times overpowers her purpose, is to seek out the margins between different writers' and researchers' voices and give each a place in this feminine narrative. Using a wide-ranging and open-ended survey of current critical and pedagogical theories which often incorporates brief critiques, Hill displays a familiarity with everything from cognitive theory to deconstructionism. Despite an attempt to utilize the tension created by its method and purpose, the work has less value as a pedagogical tool than might be hoped. Too brief in its survey of criticism to be informative and too metaphoric in its pedagogical suggestions to be practical, Hill's work does, however, provide intellectual support for all conscientious and inquisitive teachers through its narrative.

—Donald G. Lloyd

ANNOUNCEMENT

Writing Ourselves Into the Story: Unheard Voices from Composition Studies

We announce plans for a collection of essays to be edited by Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan Hunter. This volume will provide an occasion for teachers and researchers who do not feel included in the story of our evolving discipline to voice unheard perspectives. Contributors might address the following broad questions: Are there ways that the pedagogies and research methodologies we find in textbooks, hear about at professional meetings, or read in the journals don't apply to our teaching, our research, or the political situations we're involved in? What problems do we think are most worth writing about that should be included in discussions of composition studies? Please send 1-3 page proposals for essays, stories, and research by November 15, 1990, to Professor Susan Hunter, Humanities and Social Sciences Department, Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA 91711-5990. For further information, call Sheryl I. Fontaine (714) 773-3163 or Susan Hunter (714) 621-8022.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Valuing Diversity: Race, Class and Gender in Composition Research.

We are soliciting contributions for a volume that will examine/reexamine composition research in light of current calls to value diversity. To what extent has our research community attended to diversity and to what extent has it focused on the "generically human?" How does studying ways in which social hierarchies of race, class, gender, and ethnicity interact with each other lead us to ask new questions in our research? How do answers to these new questions extend or change our understanding of composition? Valuing diversity also suggests rethinking the process of doing research and implies a commitment to making professional writing accessible to diverse audiences. We ask potential contributors to submit one-page abstracts of proposed essays to Emily Jessup, English Composition Board, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 or Kathleen Geissler, Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824 by February 15, 1991.

VIDEOTAPE

Student Writing Groups: Demonstrating the Process; Wordshop Productions, Inc.; 3832 North Seventh Street; Tacoma, Washington 98406; (206) 759-6953.

This 35-minute videotape demonstrates the process of how a writing group works together to critique an essay. The essay is first read to the members of the group, who listen to the writer's prose and respond uncritically as first-time listeners. The essay is read again to the group by the writer; in a series of dialogic exchanges, the members of the group express their views on the quality of the essay, its effects on readers/listeners, and its potential for refinement and improvement. The group's responses are sharp and insightful, indicating both the dynamics of the group and the development of their skills as editors. The comments given, the praise and constructive criticism, are interesting to hear, in the sense of understanding what aspect of the essay each listener has chosen to focus on, and in the sense of how any passage can be understood from a number of perspectives. After the demonstration of this interpretive process is complete, an audience of students watching this process is invited to respond. Their comments, too, prove enlightening.

The creators of this videotape inform us that the demonstration portion "is neither scripted nor rehearsed. Group members had not heard the paper before; their responses are spontaneous. The questions from student observers that follow, however, reflect the most common concerns students and teachers have about working in writing groups." They also point out that "the demonstration group is an experienced one, and the piece of writing fairly polished." These are two important aspects of the tape because first-time viewers are likely to feel that this type of extensive and insightful critique is not what they could expect in their composition classes. The response from Wordshop Productions is that "students at all levels benefit more from seeing an experienced group in action than a less proficient one: they find it easier to visualize what their own groups can achieve with practice, and the attitude and commitment of the demonstration group sets a standard that makes student groups more productive."

There is a great deal of merit to this contention, for both students and teachers alike. Many teachers are interested in collaborative learning but uncertain of how to proceed. Some teachers have tried writing groups without a great deal of success but would try again if an appropriate model were provided. As for students, an example of a skilled group at work can be both uplifting and inspiring. Watching this videotape should give teachers a clear idea of how to use collaborative learning strategies in their classes, and students should benefit from seeing how a group of readers/listeners responds to a text.

Wordshop Productions tells us that this videotape is being used successfully in high schools, freshman writing programs, and upper-level and graduate courses, so there should be little concern that this videotape would appeal to a limited audience or would "go over the heads" of some audiences. Further, we are informed that the videotape is designed "to model structure and process rather than any particular kind of writing, so that teachers can adapt the group process to a variety of writing tasks and requirements" — such as preparing students for group work in legal writing, technical writing, creative writing, freshman composition, and writing across the curriculum. The videotape has also been widely used for teacher training.

Student Writing Groups: Demonstrating the Process is a 1989 Media and Methods Awards Portfolio winner and a finalist in the 1989 New York International Film & TV Festival. Both awards cited the videotape's "clarity of educational objectives and flexibility of curricular application." We agree with Wordshop Productions' contention that "writing groups hone a wide range of communicative skills. Students learn to listen carefully; they learn to think critically as they formulate comments on a piece of writing; they learn to read aloud, to speak in front of a group; and they learn to think about writing as an act of communication rather than as an academic exercise. Having others listen to their words instills in students a keen sense of audience, and students come to care about writing more because people are listening."

It seems more than reasonable to assert that the interactions of writing groups and the various strategies of collaborative learning are better shown in action and in process than described statically on the page. To this end, **Student Writing Groups** is an exceptional educational tool for showing students and teachers the effectiveness of group responses to individual pieces of writing. For those writing instructors interested in pursuing issues of collaborative learning, this videotape should prove a valuable and cogent find.

As an additional instructional aid, a 38-page booklet is included, which discusses the rationale behind the videotape, provides information for teachers on how to set up writing groups, and addresses the most commonly raised questions about collaborative learning. A bibliography on the theory and history of writing groups is included, as well as a printed version of the essay that is read in the tape. All in all, **Student Writing Groups** proves a most comprehensive package to assist beginning and experienced teachers with introducing writing groups and the strategies of collaborative learning into their classes. The quality of the tape as an instructional tool should also aid students greatly in refining their skills as editors and writers.