

## Student/Faculty Roles in Writing Research Papers

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### **Article:**

A graduate student who had just completed a rigorous oral defense of her master's thesis commented to the chair of the committee, "I got just what I asked for."

"What do you mean?" the chair asked.

The student responded, "Everybody knows that Dr. Jones is the 'exterminator.' She sets you straight on things with very few words, catching every possible grammatical error. And Dr. White is the 'editor.' She finds all of the irrelevant information dumped in the paper."

With some hesitation, the chair asked, "And what is my title?"

"Oh, you're the 'encourager.' I knew I needed you from the beginning to the end, to help and encourage me to move along. I chose the other two faculty because I knew I needed their skills, too."

This conversation enlightened the authors about how students select faculty to coach the writing of a research paper. Many research papers, however, are not directed and evaluated by a committee but by a single faculty member. Synthesizing the roles of the "Four E's" — encourager, editor, and exterminator, plus the role of energizer— into the personage of one faculty member can facilitate students' growth in writing abilities. As the graduate student keenly noted, we all have our preferred roles in assisting students with writing. However, we need to gain skills in all roles and to know when in the writing process to assume a particular role.

In recent years, educators have begun to focus not only on the written product — the final manuscript—but on the writing process by which that manuscript is produced. Flowers (1981) described four types of roles that we use in writing: madman, architect, carpenter, and judge. The four roles reflect levels of energy that when used at appropriate times in the writing process can effectively move the writing forward. Thinking of these as student roles that run parallel to faculty roles provides a useful framework to guide students through the process of writing research papers.

MADMAN STUDENT/ENERGIZER PROFESSOR

*Madman*

In their role of madman, students discover what interests them, identify questions or emotions that are evoked by an idea, and then quickly write about these ideas without stopping to correct, change, or delete. Madman energy flows as the writer "talks" on paper, page after page. This "madman" writing will appear messy and disconnected, but it should be saved to review at a later stage.

### *Energizer*

When the student begins the research paper, the faculty's role of energizer is invaluable. The energizer will ask students to talk about ideas that excite them, drawing out their interest in specific ideas, even if the ideas do not seem relevant to the task at hand. It is important not to be too critical at this early point.

## ARCHITECT STUDENT/ENCOURAGER PROFESSOR

### *Architect*

After the madman stage, students proceed with the architect role. The architect reads the scribbles of the madman, processes comments from the energizer, and selects a small part of the madman jottings as relevant. Here, there is little room for sentimentality about what the madman wrote. The architect's job is to select large chunks of appropriate material and arrange them in a logical structure. The architect needs to use large, organizational paragraph-level thoughts without worrying about sentence structure.

### *Encourager*

Faculty at this stage must serve as encouragers and helpers as students undertake the frustrating process of building a coherent framework for their research paper. Two strategies are effective at this stage: (a) organize a process for faculty and students to work together and establish ground rules for the responsibilities of each, as well as a timetable for the completion of tasks; and (b) assist the student to organize thoughts to lead toward the development of the framework for the paper and help to clarify and shape the student's ideas. The encourager makes comments like:

Tell me more about this idea. What are your key concepts? Would that be the main problem for your research?

How will you carry that focus throughout your paper?

## CARPENTER STUDENT/EDITOR PROFESSOR

### *Carpenter*

Sentence structure is left to the carpenter, who enters after the paper has been hewn into large chunks of related ideas. The carpenter nails these ideas together in a logical sequence, ensures that each sentence is clearly written, contributes to the development of the paragraph, and leads logically and gracefully to the next sentence. When the carpenter finishes, the paper should be smooth and watertight.

### *Editor*

At this stage, the faculty member as editor is concerned with the logical order and synthesis of the ideas. Questions to ask as the carpenter does his work:

Is the purpose clearly stated? Does the entire paper relate clearly to the purpose? Are the key concepts clear: Are they clearly threaded throughout the paper?

Are the paragraphs clearly written in a logical order?

What parts of the paper are not present, or are minimally present and need elaboration?

## JUDGE STUDENT/EXTERMINATOR FACULTY

### *Judge*

The judge comes in at this point for the final inspection. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, tone — all of these are details which the judge loves to examine so as to bring about a polished paper. Unfortunately, the judge often tries to enter at earlier stages of the writing process, and this prevents students from realizing their most creative ideas. Only after the madman has come up with the ideas, the architect has organized them, and the carpenter has nailed the ideas together sentence by sentence should the judge enter to pronounce the final verdict on the paper.

### *Exterminator*

Although its title does not sound like it would be popular, the role of exterminator is essential. The exterminator helps with fine-tuning the paper. After the ideas are generated and nailed in place on their framework, the exterminator works with the judge to look at the paper as objectively as possible — slashing, erasing, and cleaning up. At this point, the faculty member helps the student to view the paper as a whole. What is unclear? What does not add to the essence of the paper? Is the conceptual framework carried throughout the paper? Do the conclusions flow from the data analyses? By waiting until this stage to ax portions or ideas, the students' good work has already been reinforced, and they know that slashing a favorite but irrelevant sentence will improve the writing.

## ADVANTAGES OF ROLES

Using a framework of roles for guiding students in writing research papers helps to maintain the focus of writing as a process as well as a product. In conceptualizing the roles, students can break the complex task of writing a research paper into manageable stages. Rather than merely receiving a grade on their finished papers, students learn to improve their writing, as each of their roles brings about revisions. In the process of working together, faculty and students build a mentor/protégé relationship with all the resultant benefits (Brown & Sorrell, 1990). The roles also provide a new language for faculty to use in evaluating student papers—one that avoids the impression of the faculty member as "judge" (Flowers, 1981).

Whether playing with the madman, designing with the architect, building with the carpenter, or passing sentence with the judge, faculty can guide students in the production of a polished manuscript and help them not only to improve their writing but to learn through the writing process.

## REFERENCES

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