Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing, by Robert Boice (1990). New Forums Press, Inc. Stillwater OK (ISBN 0-913507-13-X).

Professors as Writers, as indicated by its full title, is intended as a "SELF-HELP GUIDE" to enable "professors" to communicate productively and painlessly in written language. The commonality of the analyzed writing concerns, however, clearly indicates that writing problems are not unique to professors. This manual may be of help to many writers, including academicians, continually under pressure to publish. Even TAA members, all of whom already have achieved writing objectives successfully, may find this book helpful. Therefore, some of the ideas expressed by Robert Boice, the author, can provide our members, most of whom also are professors, advantages in influencing hiring decisions, in acquiring promotions, and in achieving tenure, not just with financial gains.

Professors as Writers consists of 180 pages, structured into eight chapters, which are arranged in five sections. In his introduction, Boice explains that the manual resulted from two decades of identifying writing problems, conceiving writing strategies, then applying, testing and, when necessary, revising problem solutions in his teaching and in his writing workshops. Consequently, all chapters except the first (which gives a scholarly overview) are focused on identifying what Boice concludes are some main writing difficulties, on prescribing solutions for them, and on methods to generate and to maintain writing productivity. To achieve these objectives, these chapters are directed at changing habits and attitudes of writers so they can recognize and apply "unself-conscious" techniques to discover ideas and to control external situations in a manner that ensures effective writing regularly. Chapter 7 prescribes methods for facilitating self-control of thought and

emotions to avoid recurrence of writing problems by applying social supports, social skills, and a sense of the audience.

In his manual (and in his workshops), Boice prescribes a sequence of steps essential for overcoming "writer's block", the inability to start or to resume a writing project. He recommends the use of written questionnaires and interviews first to diagnose individual writing problems. Next, he assigns what he calls "results-first" sessions, consisting of spontaneous writing followed by generative writing. To do spontaneous writing, workshop participants are asked to write whatever pops into their minds without doing extensive judging or editing. Doing this is a kind of unself-conscious thinking, the kind some of us refer to as free writing, free association, undirected thinking, or brainstorming. This writing without conscious awareness, according to Boice, enables writers to overcome the main causes for writers' block. These causes are: procrastinating the beginning of the project, waiting for perfecting each segment of the product before continuing with the next, and being impatient with producing each part effectively. By understanding these causes, Boice explains writers become better able to separate the producing process from the revising process, helping them to avoid causing the internal editors from starting to work too early, and, consequently, from obstructing the writing procedure. In support of his explanation, Boice gives this quotation from Yogi Berra to help him explain what he means: "You can't think and hit at the same time."

The author of this manual also prescribes generative writing to overcome problems that confront writers. In generative writing, writers are directed by a certain topic. In other words, in spontaneous writing the unself-conscious mind randomly discovers what is to be written, but in generative writing the conscious mind is guided by a topic in doing more directed writing. The conscious mind plays an

HENNINGS WINS TEACHER EDUCATION AWARD

Dorothy Grant Hennings, TAA #242, and professor at Kean College of New Jersey, has won the prestigious *Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading* award, given annually to a member of the International Reading Association. The award carries a $1000 prize sponsored by the Houghton Mifflin Company.

important role in the generative writing phase by helping to effect necessary planning, selecting related supporting words and ideas, and writing the first rough draft of the intended communication. According to Boice, this focusing on a topic is enough to make the transition from pure spontaneity in writing to producing useful copy effectively and painlessly. He contends that this two-step system can produce better writing, more writing, and quicker completion of what is intended.

According to Boice, spontaneous and generative writing help writers to overcome the main causes for writers' block by helping to control perfectionism by establishing a tolerance for incorrect or ineffective components until the revision of the critical analysis of the last rough draft is done. They diminish or eliminate writing apprehension by building confidence from allowing writers to experience the satisfaction of producing some writing painlessly and with increasing degrees of effectiveness. This hands-on experience also helps reduce writers' impatience by teaching how writing improves in quality by slowing down the process. Also, results-first writing, according to Boice, reinforces determination to achieve the writing objectives by directing efforts at manageable units of work and by slackening the pressure to constantly be clever, original, and to write flawlessly.

Professors as Writers goes beyond discussing diagnoses of

psychological causes for writers' block and suggesting effective remedies for them. Chapters 6 and 7 propose ways to enable overcoming another import psychological difficulty writers may have: that concern is the need to write regularly and productively. The author emphasizes in these chapters that it is not enough that writers, including professors, be able to write. They must be able to move beyond the drudgery of demanded output to regular productivity that is not grudgingly done. Professors, and other writers, according to Boice, can't always wait until they have the time to write as much as they want to or must. To ensure regular productivity, he recommends two remedies: (1) Applying the Priority Principle and (2) Resorting to Contingency Management. Spontaneous and/or generative writing can occur any time writers feel like work: therefore, writing often becomes irregular and blocking easily reemerges because writers aren't always so inclined. Boice's Priority Principle instructs writers in the mechanics and techniques of ensuring the priority of writing projects in their activity schedules. He prescribes methods for rearranging writing habits, avoiding writing binges, and for directing efforts at completion of a reasonable portion of the project – not too much nor too little – during a certain writing session. Also, he explains why sites and furnishings for writing must be selected so they encourage and reinforce the writing effort.

Professors as Writers prescribes "contingency management," a form of stimulus control, to ensure productive written output regularly even when writers, for one reason or another, find writing difficult. When rearranging daily priorities and redesigning writing environments are not adequate, Boice recommends contingency management, to help ensure that writing becomes a habitual priority. Contingency Management, as explained by him, should be anything that will force writers to write. In other words, it is the application of "reward or punishment" imposed by writers on themselves as instiga-

tions to produce. It is just a way of conditioning their own behavior to write. Here is an example. Boice requires any writer in a workshop to write a check donating a large amount of money to a hated organization if at least a prescribed number of pages are not written within an allotted time. According to him, "This forced regular writing facilitates creative thinking." He gives us just a glimpse of what he means by creative thinking by saying that it involves "directed remembering" and "readiness to perceive the unexpected."

In Chapter 7 the author discusses The Four-Step Plan which he proposes will enable people to overcome writing problems as well as to provide techniques and skills essential for achieving efficient written communication successfully. Here are these four steps:

1. Automaticity   3. Self-Control
2. Externality   4. Sociality

Automaticity and Externality act as headings for what has been explained in Chapters 3-6. Automaticity identifies what occurs while doing the unself-conscious process previously discussed as spontaneous and generative writing. Externality identifies how writers use external controls to maintain writing regularity and momentum by applying "the priority principle" and various forms of stimulus controls, including contingency management. From observations during workshops, Boice, however, concluded that writers often do not feel adequately rewarded for their efforts. They sometimes also are frustrated by rudeness or what they consider incompetence of publishers or their reviewers. Many times they are not sure that the results of their hard work are adequately appreciated. Consequently, he recognized the need in his program for learning to apply the third and fourth steps in the preceding list, Self-Control and Sociality. These are essential to extend the time writers will continue to apply their hard-earned talents. He realized that writers retrogress into being afflicted with persistent writing blocks unless they also derive self-fulfillment from what they achieve. In discussing Step 3, Self-

Control, Boice places emphasis on the need writers have to apply "self-talk" in psyching themselves into positive (or negative) self-awareness. Self-talk is a method by which writers conduct inner (silent) conversations to establish control over consciousness of the self. Therefore, he urges readers to apply encouraging inner discourse to help engender enthusiasm, confidence, and positive moods to achieve self-appreciation from what has been written.

By means of discussing Step 4, Sociality, Boice explains his realization that maintaining continued regular productivity, successful writers also need human interaction. They need the suggestions, criticisms, and various other kinds of feedback, not just from themselves via self-talk, but also from reactions of anyone willing to express them. Under Sociality, Boice explains how writers can and should solicit feedback along with how to react to favorable or unfavorable comments about their work.

In the remainder of Chapter 7, *Professors as Writers* contains explanations of how Boice guides his workshop participants in applying The Four-Step Plan during all stages of writing. He instructs the reader how to use these steps when starting a new project, when resuming a disrupted one, when revising a rejected project, and while continually working on lengthy ones.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, of this manual deals mainly with what writers must do to avoid relapses into the same problems discussed in the preceding chapters. In addition to the instructional contents of these chapters,

Professors as Writers mainly presents a different perspective of written communication. It is not that of an English instructor, but that of a psychologist. It contains many of the same ideas and methods employed in the traditional English classroom, but with different labels for them. For example, his "results-first" approach by means of "spontaneous" and "generative" writing, as explained before, is studied in some composi-

Rita K. Baltus	North Central Technical College	Psychology
Sara Blake	El Camino College	English Composition
Audrey K. Buffington	Wayland High School	Mathematics
Ronald T. Farrar	University of South Carolina	Journalism
Alice R. Garr	Herricks Public Schools	Mathematics
Elaine Hughes	Nassau Community College	English Composition
Bruce Jansson	University of Southern California	Social Work
Karen Lane	Jarrettsville MD	Allied Health
Joseph M. Moran	Univ of Wisconsin-Green Bay	Earth Science
Steven-Michael Patterson	Fort Worth TX	Spanish
Sue Titus Reid	Florida State University	Criminology
Stuart C. Shapiro	SUNY-Buffalo	Computer Science
Carolyn D. Smith	Bayside NY	Social Sciences
John Stoeckinger	Indianapolis IN	Mathematics
Judith Stone	Suffolk Community College	Biology
Jeffrey D. Ullman	Stanford University	Computer Science
Shokichi Uto	Nihon Univ, Chiba-Ken, Japan	Philosophy
Glen Vannatta	Boca Raton FL	Mathematics

tion textbooks as "free-writing" or "brainstorming." Other terms in the manual mainly express this perspective of a psychologist, not necessarily new writing principles. Here are typical samples: "phenomenology of writing", "psychological disruptives", "phobic avoidance", "thought substitution", etc. The psychological attitude that dominates the book is easily detected also in the bibliography at the end of each chapter and in the annotated bibliography in the appendix. In both, there is a predominance of sources and comments by prominent psychologists about writing. Both can be very helpful, especially for anyone researching communication from the viewpoint of a psychologist. Also at the end of some of the chapters, Boice has inserted questionnaires and writing exercises, typical of those used in his writing workshops, that will help readers of the manual to diagnose psychological writing problems.

Probably, even the thesis for *Professors as Writers* originated from Boice's research in psychology for his MA and PHD Degrees along with that done later as a professor of psychology. Apparently from his research and other observations, one conclusion he made is that the cause for most writing problems:

...seems to lie in the ways writing is typically taught and practiced. Only a handful of the thousands of writers I've surveyed recalled a useful and encouraging education in writing. Fewer still remembered writing teachers who didn't delight in perfectionism and criticism. None remembered much about learning to write beyond classroom assignments...And finally none recalled discussions about dealing with writing problems.

Here is another:
Primary teachers get the brunt of the blame. They are recalled for undermining students' confidence as writers, for excluding playfulness from writing and providing little useful knowledge about ways of improving writing.

These and similar statements expressing pessimistic convictions occur in several places in this book. Considering the negative reports appearing in the media today about the writing abilities of students, including graduate students, I am reluctant to disagree with the author. Somewhat, near the end of the manual, however, Boice inserts this afterthought, indicating that his attitude has changed somewhat:

My initial pessimistic view of the literature on writing problems changed as I discovered that I had been blissfully unaware of some sources and that the field is growing dramatically.

This meaculpa, perhaps, will enable some of us who have spent many years teaching writing and who have written textbooks advo-

cating some traditional composition principles and pedagogy to be less discouraged.

Professors as Writers needs more explanation of the mechanics of writing along with more specific directions telling writers how to do actual writing, how to select effective content and assemble it into appropriate patterns of organization. It also needs more discussion of some of the various methods that help achieving the overall purpose of a written communication. In other words, it must go beyond the psychological blocks and motivations of the writer. It would help if it also contained explanations and illustrations of the process of adapting ideas and effects to the intended type of reader.

This manual did give me a worthwhile idea for future research: the though that TAA members (all successful writers) could be very helpful in participating in a survey aimed at determining how each learned to write. Was it learned mainly during years of formal education; if so, when and where? Was it learned mostly the hard way, self-taught; how? Give it some thought and, if you can manage your writing-block, send me your comments via TAA.

Joseph P. Dagher
Professor Emeritus, English
Schoolcraft College
Livonia MI