

Dobbs Tries Innovative Approach

by J. Hunter

Elizabeth Dobbs, Professor of English, is developing a new way of working with the Writing Lab this semester. While most of the students we see in the Writing Lab come in with their papers before they hand them in, Dobbs asks that her students not bring the papers to the Lab in draft form.

Instead, she has devised an innovative way to use the lab instructors to help her teach writing. The following excerpt from her instructions explains how she instructs students to use the lab after she has returned their corrected papers to them:

If you want to work on your writing this semester, the practice I want you to follow is: sign up for a Writing Lab appointment as soon as you get your paper; go over paper with the Writing Lab instructor and attend especially to the thesis, the relation between thesis and topic sentences, and transitions within paragraphs; if you're having trouble with elementary mistakes (each indicated by an "x" next to an abbreviation,) be sure to get those straightened out during your meeting; if it seems useful, work out with the instructor a short rewriting assignment that you can do in a couple of hours (e.g., rewrite the introductory paragraph or a paragraph from the body of the argument; write an outline for a revised argument); bring that piece of rewriting to a conference with me. The entire process is most helpful if accomplished in no more than about ten days from the return of the paper.

When you turn in your second argument, I want to look again at this first one and any rewriting you've done. Please put both arguments and all rewriting in a folder with your name and box number clearly printed on the front, so that I can return it to you through the mail. I shall tear my hair out, scream, and do other dire things if I see the same problems in your second argument. In other words, improvement is a positive factor in my grading; repeating the same mistakes is a negative one.