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From the Editors

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From The Editors

Once upon a time, in the not-very-distant past, computers were the enemy. Writing center people viewed them as mechanistic, impersonal, and highly threatening to a way of life we had carefully nurtured—a life that privileged human interaction. At conferences frightening stories circulated about whole writing centers that were replaced by computer labs, about unfeeling administrators who believed that computers were more efficient and cost-effective than tutors, and about students who preferred computer-assisted drill-and-practice exercises to a dialogue with a tutor. We felt challenged, threatened, and, worst of all, old-fashioned.

Today, computers are our allies—the tools we use to help our students, to keep our records, to print our journals, and to write our professional papers, textbooks, lesson plans, and administrative reports. We talk about memory chips, kilobytes, and storage capacity as freely as we discuss invention, style, and arrangement. What happened between the once upon a time and now to enable us to accept the computer as a friend and ally?

For one thing, we learned what computers can and cannot do. After we stopped expecting them to perform miracles and stopped fearing that they would replace us, we began to understand that they could make writing easier and faster if not better. We discovered that word processing, rather than CAI or text-editing programs, was the most valuable capability that computers afforded us. This discovery in turn led us to realize that computers can supplement the dialogue between tutor and writer, can reinforce the need for revision, can help students understand the process of shaping a piece of discourse, and can make writing less of a physical (if not mental) chore than it used to be. As a result, computers have changed the way we write and the way we teach writing. In many instances we still expect too much or too little of this new technology, but we are gradually and effectively coming to terms with both its limitations and its potential.

In this first special-topic issue of *The Writing Center Journal*, we explore some of the questions, concerns, and benefits that have resulted from our use of computers in the writing center. Fred Kemp's provocative article suggests future directions of composition software while Jeanne Luchte's essay surveys existing programs that can be used in writing centers. In two other articles, Anne Wright and Pamela Farrell share their experiences with computers in high school writing centers. S. Bailey Shurbutt offers practical advice on computers and peer revision. Then, in paired reviews, Bill Emmett and David Partenheimer describe their different reactions to WANDAH, the software program for student writers now marketed as *HBJ Writer*. Dawn Rodrigues reviews *A Writer's Introduction to Word Processing*

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(Wadsworth), and Lynn Meeks reviews *Writing on Computers in English Comp.* Finally, this issue also includes Jay Jacoby's annual "Bibliography of Writing Center Research."

We hope that the articles and reviews in this issue will give you new understanding of the different roles that computers can assume in the writing center.