

“Into the world of daylight and fresh air”

The process of reviewing articles for professional journals has been and remains mysterious to many writers and readers. Who gets assigned reviews? On what bases do they make their judgments? How are authors informed? Do they have a chance to revise? How does the editor decide what pieces finally are chosen for an issue of the journal? These questions are paralyzing to some authors who are reluctant to submit pieces, bothersome to others who resist sending their carefully written work into unfamiliar territory, and irritating to others who feel the system may favor some writers over others.

The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Teaching Writing* seeks to open its reviewing process in the hope that you will be comfortable submitting your work for response and that you will understand the path which led published pieces to their places in the journal.

Although some pieces are accepted upon first submission, most articles which are eventually printed are revised based on suggestions by reviewers and the authors' own reappraisals. Sometimes reviewers are assigned articles based on their expertise in the topic or perspective on the article, but more often articles are distributed across the board to equalize the number of assignments. Board members are well qualified at their own academic level but also must be active at another level: for instance, a college professor might be part of a National Writing Project; a secondary teacher may teach part-time at a local university. Reviewers, therefore, understand the *JTW* kindergarten through university audience and are able to be good readers in many arenas.

Each article has two initial reviewers, who may recommend acceptance, acceptance with revision, revision before further consideration, or rejection. When a piece is resubmitted, the

same reviewers read the new version and make a recommendation to accept, accept with revision, or reject. No author is asked to revise more than once unless we are sure that we will publish the piece.

Each author receives two reviews and a letter from me to explain the evaluation of his or her article. Sometimes with a split recommendation, perhaps an accept with revision and a reject, I decide whether to proceed with the piece in the review process. With our audience, our semi-annual publication schedule, our desire to publish a range of topics, genres, and perspectives, and many other factors in mind I also decide on which pieces are finally selected for which issue. Approximately ten percent of submitted manuscripts are published each year.

Recently, the Editorial Board has initiated two practices to demystify the reviewing process. First, many of our reviewers now sign their review letters. These reviewers address their letters directly to the author identifying effective features of the writing and suggestions for revision, whether or not the piece is to be reconsidered by *JTW*. I have noticed that reviewers who sign their names allow their own voice to be heard and speak as if in a conversation with the author. When queried about their reactions to receiving signed reviews, all authors, including those who received rejections, have affirmed the practice.

The second practice which we hope will demystify the reviewing process appears for the first time in this issue. With the author's and reviewers' permissions, we are publishing review letters that responded to the article written by Johanna Atwood. Although we have not included the first submitted piece, you can understand from the review letters some of the changes that occur before the final draft. Notice the presence of positive and negative criticism and the enjoyment of the reviewers in reading the submission. Just as teachers who suggest that students revise work genuinely hope for that revision, reviewers really want authors to bring their articles to publication. Although reviewers do not know names of authors, they write directly to authors as they would to any colleagues who have asked their advice about their writing.

In the May 1994 issue of *Composition Chronicle* Bill McCleary remarks about a discussion at the Conference on College Composition and Communication which called for signed reviews of professional journal submissions. He quotes an article in *Writing Sociology* in which Andrew Greeley concludes that

“(I)f there is any seriousness about improving the quality of writing in the professional journals, the review process must be taken out of the musty basements where dark deeds flourish and be brought into the world of daylight and fresh air, where full responsibility is taken for whatever one writes, be it article or review.”

The *Journal of Teaching Writing* is committed to openness in the reviewing process. Please let us hear your suggestions about practices that would encourage you to work toward publication. If you sign reviews for another journal or have received signed reviews, we would like to learn from your experiences. *JTW* exhibits yearly at CCCC and at NCTE, so stop by the booth to meet Editorial Board members who staff it. You are welcome also to write any Editorial Board member or me with your ideas.

We hope that you enjoy this issue, beginning with the kind of response letters you could expect should you decide to submit work to *JTW*. We hope to hear from you!

Barbara Cambridge

