

4 Finding a Space

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In reading the responses to my survey of high school writing center directors, I noticed a pattern in the descriptions of facilities throughout the country. Therefore, I asked several directors to send sketches of their labs/centers. Those who responded had very similar layouts, so I asked industrial arts teacher Dick Allen to plot sketches on the computer. The resulting diagrams (see figures 1 through 5) show the tremendous similarities and offer you, the reader, a look at the actual space apportionments of existing high school writing labs/centers.

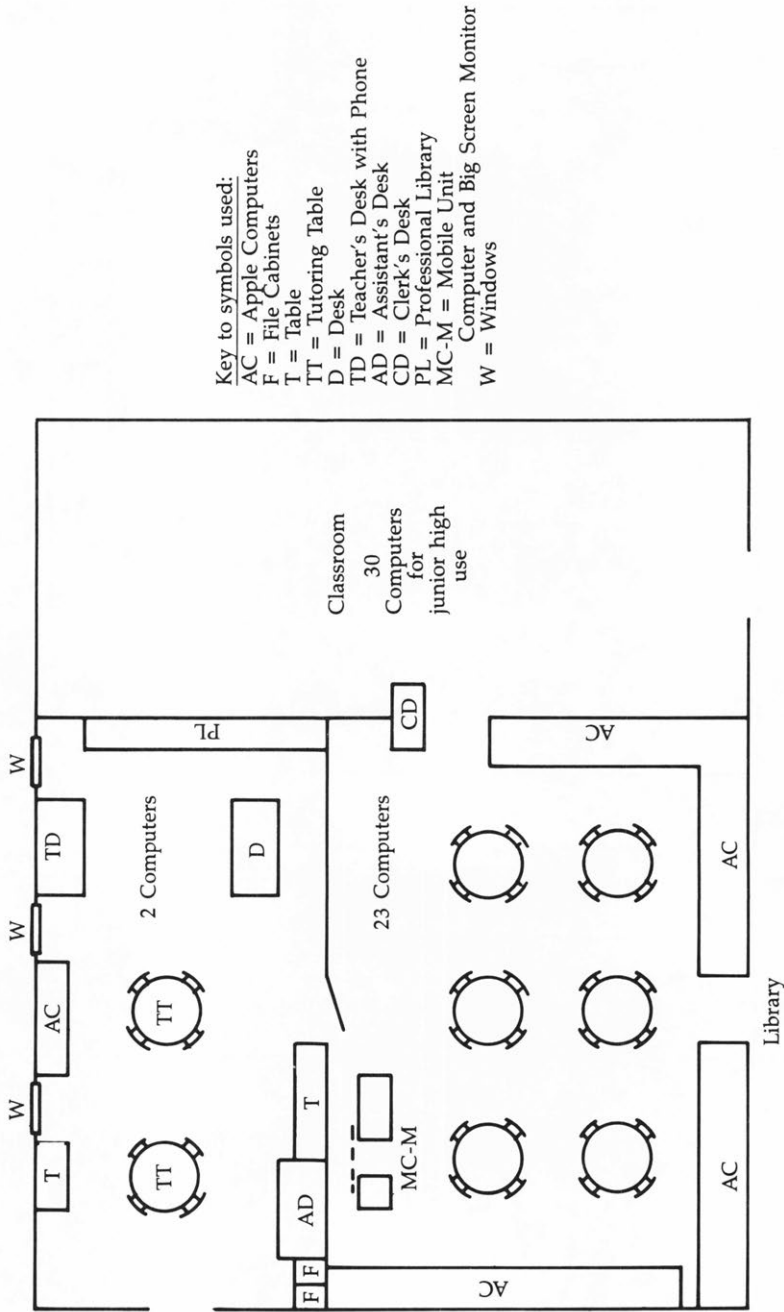
As important as the space itself might be, the location of the space may be even more important. Based on my survey, the most desirable or functional location is within or adjacent to the library or media center. Responses indicate that the reasons seem to be visibility, access, and necessity: public schools, by law, must provide supervision for every area within the school where students are permitted. Since most writing center directors also teach classes and since other professional staff cannot be released from assignments such as hall duty, facilities could not function during the entire school day. If, however, the writing lab/center is located within the media center, then a professional assigned to that area may be technically and legally responsible for the writing lab/center space as well. As mentioned in the chapters dealing with peer tutors, students rather than professional staff may maintain the lab/center during the periods when the director is teaching. In schools with full-time directors and professional staff, the proximity to the media center helps facilitate research and availability of audiovisual equipment and security.

The other area of the building that seems to be a viable location is the English area. Whether the school has a wing designated the "English wing" or there are open classrooms within one section of

the school, many directors have found this location advantageous because of its convenience and accessibility. Teachers staffing the writing lab/center, mostly English teachers, need not travel around the school to get to their writing lab/center assignment. Also, students can easily be sent there from English classes with the knowledge that they will arrive before the class period ends! On a personal note, I have found this location best because all students have an English class and, therefore, pass by our open doors sometime during the school day. Many stop in just to see what the facility has to offer them, and, for some, a warm "hello" is the only positive experience they have had during their day. Therefore, many return on the premise of visiting when, in fact, they want to talk about their writing.

Other locations, for the most part, have been determined for the directors by administrators: in order to implement a writing lab/center, directors have willingly taken any available or converted space in the building just to "get their feet in the door." A writing lab/center cannot grow if it does not exist in the first place. If I had not accepted the file cabinet and round table to use under the steps in the media center, I never would have been given the locked room with a computer that we outgrew two years later. Now I have an adequate space, but I must share it with classes all day. Unfortunately, these anecdotal comments are some of the realities of space and location.

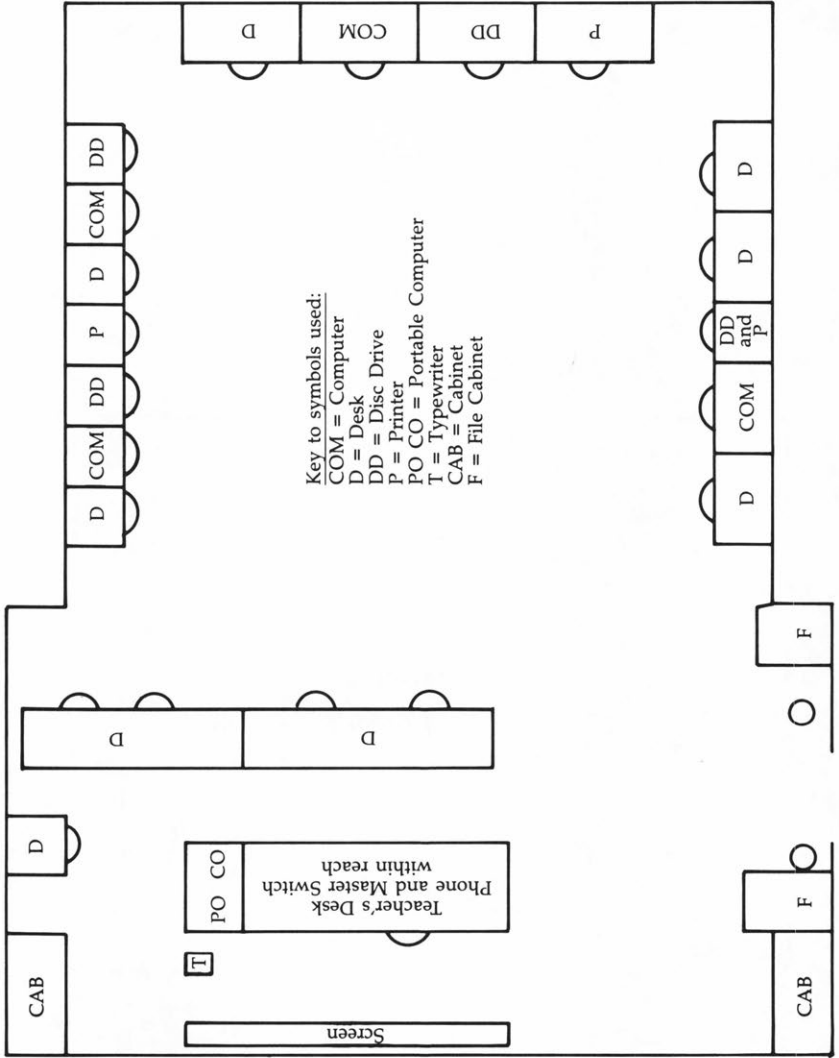
Many of the directors who have contributed to this book infer or even describe a certain atmosphere that must be maintained in their writing labs/centers. They refer to a "nonthreatening space" or what I have always called a "low-risk environment." Through the use of plants, carpeting, private corners, posters, and so forth, many directors have been able to create a comfortable area where students feel free to talk about writing, work on their own writing process, write to think, learn, and know. Certainly the personality of the director will influence this creation of space, but most directors insist on the input of students in the decorating of the area. Depending on the philosophy of the lab/center, the director and students must work on creating a friendly environment that encourages students to come there for remediation, enrichment, experimentation with language and ideas. Therefore, diagrams and locations cannot describe what is expressed in the thoughts and feelings of directors in depicting their own writing labs/centers.



Key to symbols used:

- AC = Apple Computers
- F = File Cabinets
- T = Table
- TT = Tutoring Table
- D = Desk
- TD = Teacher's Desk with Phone
- AD = Assistant's Desk
- CD = Clerk's Desk
- PL = Professional Library
- MC-M = Mobile Unit
- Computer and Big Screen Monitor
- W = Windows

Fig. 1. Hazelwood West High School Writing Lab.



Key to symbols used:
 COM = Computer
 D = Desk
 DD = Disc Drive
 P = Printer
 PO CO = Portable Computer
 T = Typewriter
 CAB = Cabinet
 F = File Cabinet

FIG. 3 THE WRITING CENTER FLOOR PLAN

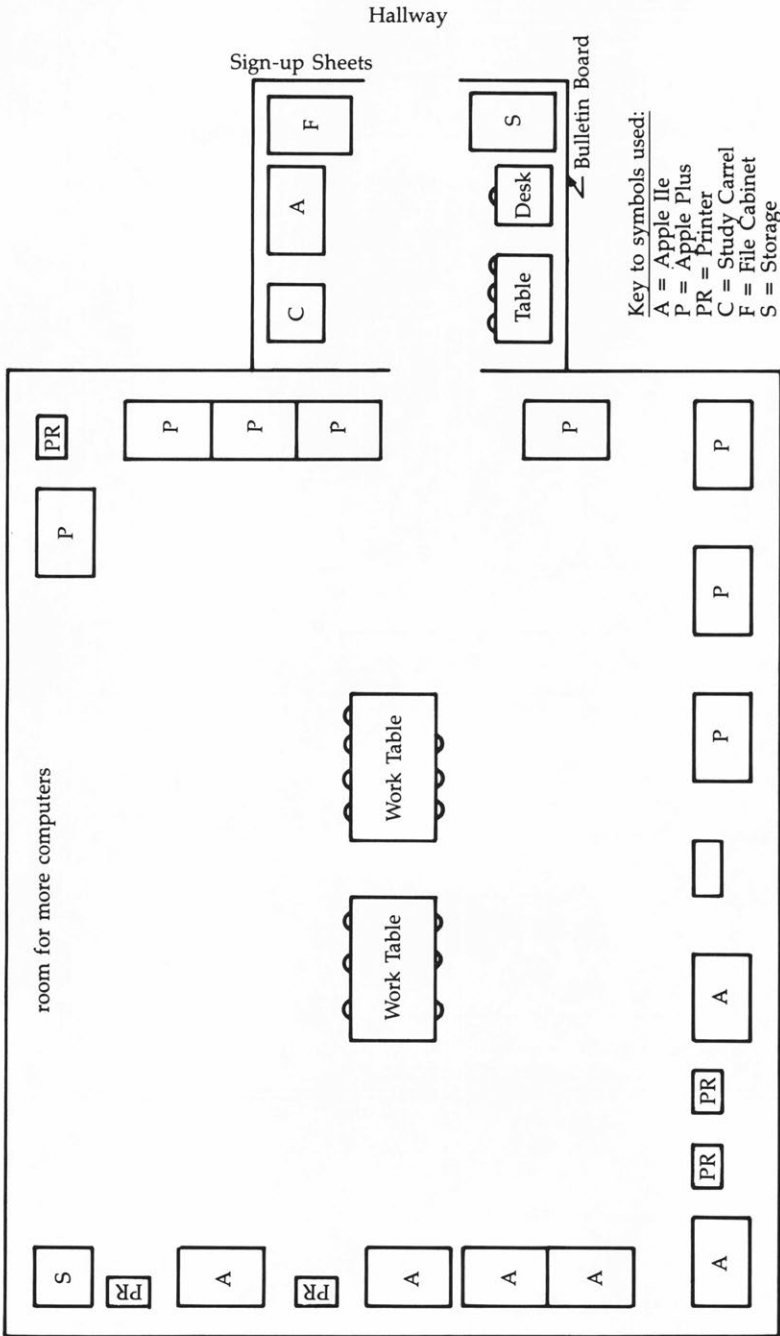


Fig. 3. Pattonville High School Writing Center.

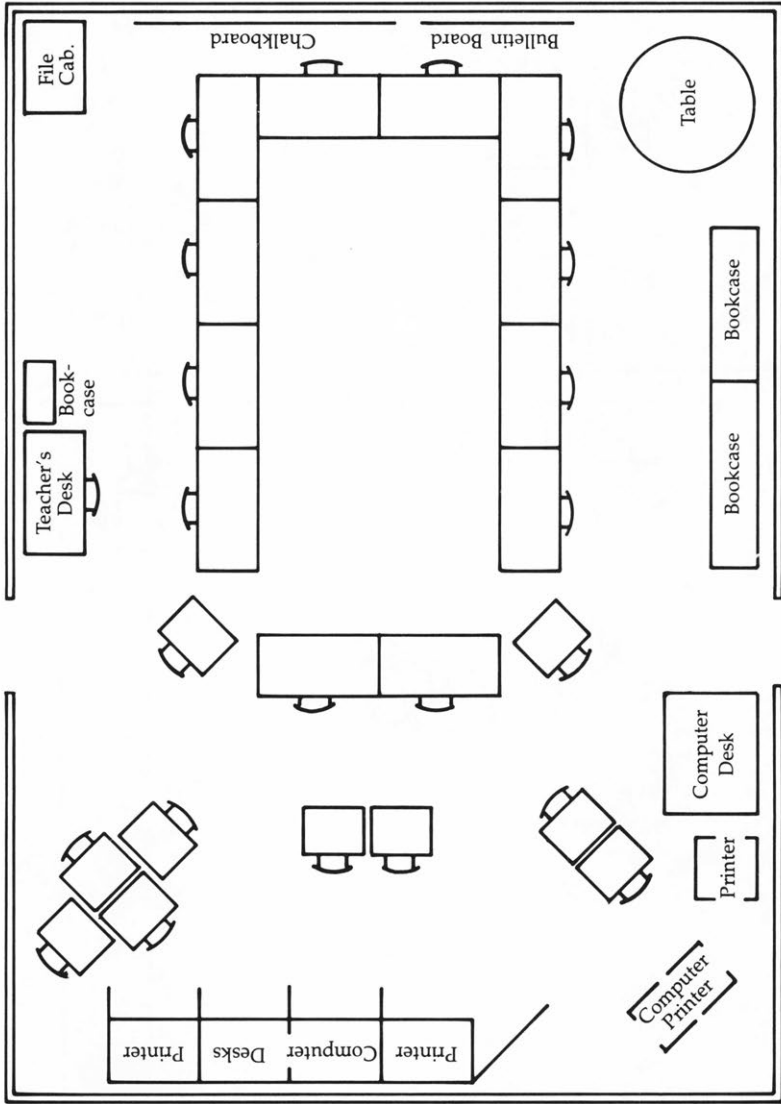


Fig. 4. Red Bank Regional High School Writing Center.

Key to symbols used:
A = Apple II
and printer
B = Bookshelves
C = Study Carrell
S = Storage

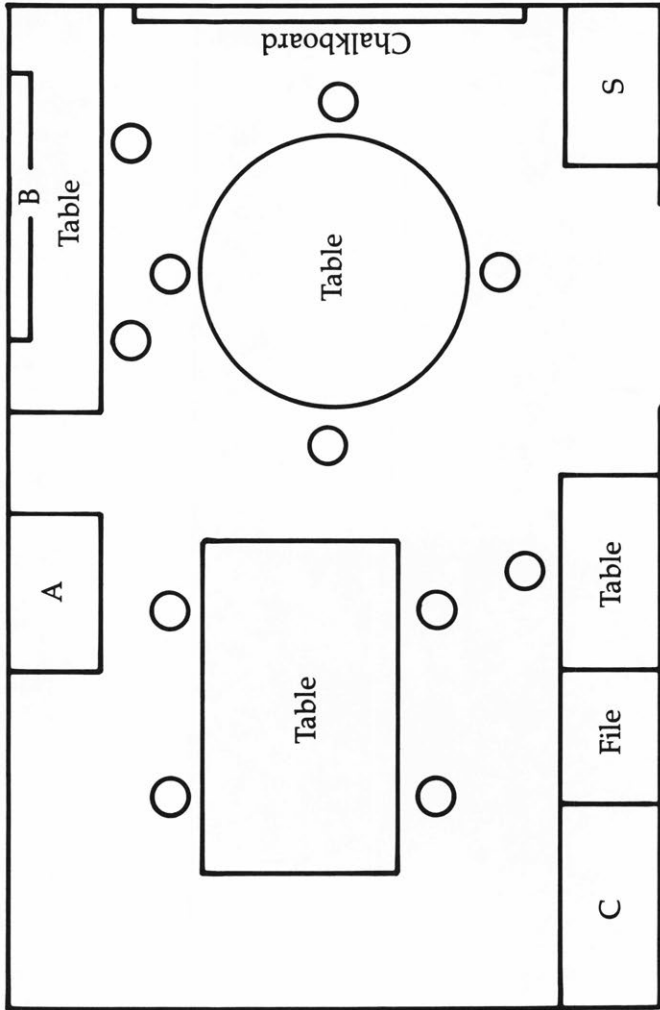


Fig. 5 Scarsdale High School Writing Center.