

Some Detritus from "Debris"

Abigail B. Calkin

Albrecht (1981), Lovitt (1981), Albertson & Billingsley (1996) and Calkin (1997) have presented Standard Celeration Charts on writing. Lovitt's article reported his process and products while he wrote *Tactics of Teaching*. The other authors showed data on the teaching and learning of writing.

I wish to broaden this knowledge by sharing data on writing two poems. On 5 November, a few days after the end of the 1997 Precision Teaching/ Standard Celeration conference while on a train ride from Vermont to New York City, I wrote two poems and gathered data about that writing process. The chart has frequency data only for, other than that day, I've not counted words written and edited.

On the chart, I labeled the first writing of the poem "writing." The changes I then made to that copy, I labeled "editing." I did not keep track of the writing and editing time separately. I spent one hour thinking certain words, phrases, and images, editing and refining them before I began writing the first poem. Thus, the chart shows a one hour record floor for *Debris I*. No time elapsed between writing the first & second poems. The thought time for the second poem probably occurred during the thought, writing, and editing time for the first poem.

I found it interesting, surprising, that the frequencies of words written (five to six words per minute), deleted (nine to eleven per ten minutes), and inserted (six to nine per ten minutes) are about the same for both poems. Perhaps my writing frequency is fairly consistent, and I've not looked at that before. However, some differences do exist--*Debris I* had fewer changes per words written than *Debris II*. I felt then, and still feel, better about the first poem than the second. Is that because the ratio of words written to deleted (x7) and

inserted (x10) is greater in the first poem, i.e., I made fewer changes? The ratios for the second poem of words written to deleted are x5 and, to inserted, x6, close but still, proportionately more changes. The ratios might explain my reaction, or it could be that the first poem is more bucolic, and the second one a response to the urban sights of southern Connecticut.

I'm not sure what made it possible to count these poems. I boarded Amtrak at noon (on time from Montreal to southern Vermont *and* to NYC, I might add) and began to write at 1:00. Since my dissertation days in the 1970's, when one day I worked for about twelve hours on some details and felt I had accomplished nothing as I looked at the completed product, I have kept track of my writing time. Thus, I look at my watch as I start and stop writing. It offers me no "real," i.e., frequency, data but it does let me know I am producing some writing. In the short term, it makes me feel better. (At the end of each year I count total lines written, works published, and separately in each category: poetry lines, and poems, written, sent out, & published; precision teaching pages completed, sent out, and published; and fiction first draft lines written, pages completed (but not the drafts between the first and the completion), pages sent out, and published. On a yearly basis, this is a product I can measure.)

Some thoughts on what may have made it possible to count the process of writing these two poems include: having just attended the Precision Teaching conference which included more presentations on inners and thinking skills than ever before; being alone and captive on a train; and writing by hand not computer (changes did not disappear with the "delete" key). I do not plan to add this measurement to all my writing, not even as I write this article!

In a slight but relevant aside, I'd like to interject a question Mickey Keenan asked me on 31 May

CALENDAR WEEKS

5 NOV 97
DAY MO YR

DAY MO YR

5 NOV 97
DAY MO YR

DAY MO YR

DAY MO YR

DAY MO YR

1000

500

100

50

10

5

1

.5

.1

.05

.01

.005

.001

0

DEBRIS I

TH TH/W

1ST 2ND

DEBRIS II

TH TH/W

1ST 2ND

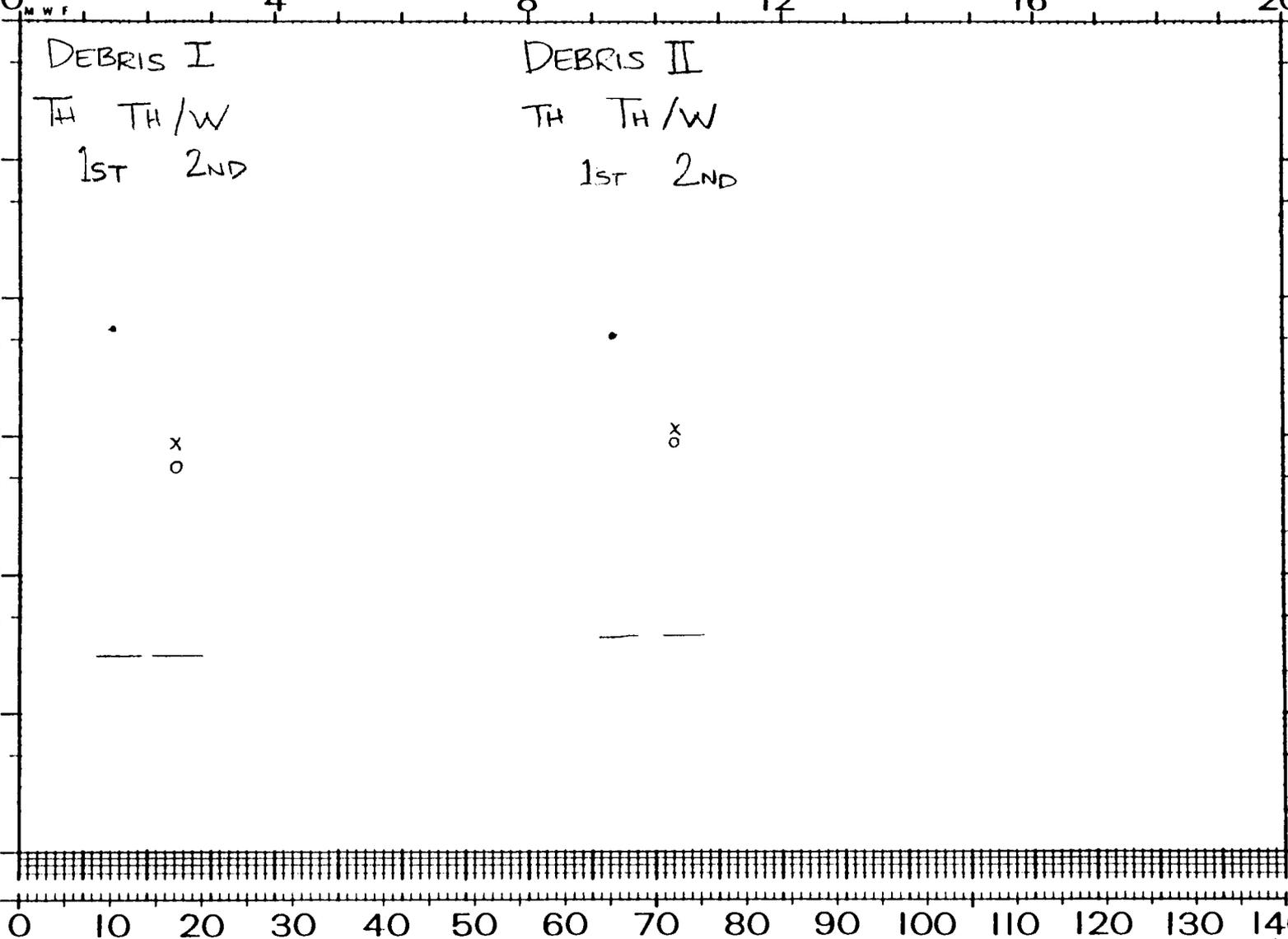
COUNTING PERIOD FLOORS

MIN HRS

1
2
5
10
20
50
100
200
500
1000
-24

88

COUNT PER MINUTE



A.B. CALKIN

SUPERVISOR

ADVISER

A.B. CALKIN

MANAGER

SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS

ABIGAIL CALKIN 56

BEHAVIOR

AGE

LABEL

WORDS WRITTEN
 • COUNTED
 x DELETED
 o INSERTED

DEPOSITOR

AGENCY

ABC

TIMER

ABC

COUNTER

ABC

CHARTER

1997 as we exchanged some poems about the process of looking at inners.

Can the writing of a poem be considered as a legitimate scientific activity, or are scientists destined to [be] included in the same camp as literary critics? Maybe some scientists should learn to see the possibility that others do not see in their "art" [when] instead the others see the destructive analysis of the beauty of life.

This led me to Webster's definition of science:

1a. In possession of knowledge as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding; 1b. Knowledge possessed or attained through study or practice. 2a. A branch or department of systematized knowledge that can be made a specific object of study. 2b. Something (as a sport or technique) that may be studied or learned like systematized knowledge..." etc.

nothing, Mickey, until we get beyond definitions 1 and 2 and on to 3a, that precludes the writing of a poem as a scientific activity. (I can think of one scientist and poet with an international reputation in both fields--Loren Eiseley. His scientific writing hit the common press in the 1960's, decades before Carl Sagan's did, and his poetry hit the common press also, more than most poetry ever does in this country. He is the only both quality scientist *and* quality poet, or even fiction writer, I know of...in any language.)

Unless I then rewrite the whole poem at this point or make a hard copy of each draft when working on the computer, I do not plan to track revisions. Nor do I think it is important enough to pursue trying to obtain such data. I may try this once more, however, to see if the words written, deleted, and inserted are about the same.

All this does harken me back to Virginia Woolf's 1929 statement about measuring discouragement on the mind of an artist as we measure Grade A milk on the body of a rat.

This is another measure of inners...and this one includes the process of creativity.

Debris I-- 1 hour thinking
40' writing (1st & 2nd drafts)
first draft--221 words
second "-- deleted 34 words
inserted 6

phrases/clauses/words for a total of

22 words inserted
Debris II-- 1/2 hour thinking ?????
30' writing (1st & 2nd drafts)
first draft--160 words
second " -- deleted 35 words
inserted 8 phrases,

clauses, words for a total of

27 words

References

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