

opportunity for students to read one another's writing, that he spends very little time reading what students write and certainly does not take very seriously their attempts to communicate on paper. But most insidious of all is the instructor who labels "disorganized" and "rambling" all essays that do not conform to a particular pattern, be it the traditional five-paragraph structure or some other idiosyncratic design, even as he is in the very act of insisting that "Good writing is creative." On the other hand, the instructor who does in truth make an honest attempt to respect all outlooks, interact with all texts, and view all form as unique to content, who, in short, allows students to discover and actualize their own purposes, does not really need openly to assert anything at all, since his actions and attitudes alone will, for most students, bring about positive changes in composing behavior.

And, I think, despite his title and opening paragraph, insincerity and misapplication are really what Hashimoto has in mind when he labels certain assertions "needless." For it seems that all pedagogically oriented statements *are* needless, not to mention pointless, useless, and counterproductive, if they are not reflected in practice. But to discard the assertions themselves while suggesting no suitable alternatives, especially in view of the fact that the "writing rules" discussed above would like as not move in to fill the resultant vacancy, also seems needless, pointless, useless, and counterproductive. For if these are, as Hashimoto says, assertions "that everyone would agree with but no one knows what to do with after they agree" (19), it appears that we would be moving backward were we to allow such beliefs simply to vanish permanently beneath a tangled mass of unproductive definitions. We could instead move forward by attempting, through trial, error and re-trial, to determine how we can best put these generalizations to use in the freshman classroom.

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Essay Evaluation as a Framework for Teaching Assistant Training

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Essay evaluation appears in virtually all agendas for teaching assistant training, and it generally is cited in critiques of the workshop as, in retrospect, one of the most valuable activities. Yet its place in agendas, like those of the other events, varies

widely from *in medias res* to a grand conclusion. Rarely does the evaluation of essays begin the workshop (after the obligatory welcomes of course). In such an initial position, however, it can provide a sequence for activities that stresses the ultimate goal of any freshman-writing workshop.

Essay evaluation can organize the workshop when it occurs in conjunction with relatively detailed profiles of the "A," "B," "C," "D," and "F" freshman essays. The faculty members of a departmental freshman English committee can most effectively create these profiles in the months prior to the workshop. The following process has proved to be efficient. Each committee member composes a two-hundred-word paragraph describing the traits of the "A" freshman essay; members compare and discuss respective paragraphs in the group meeting; a designated individual, who has taken notes during the meeting, writes a synthesized paragraph, reflecting the agreed-upon qualities of the "A" paper. This three-step process is repeated for each of the other four kinds of essays. Finally, a stylist within the committee casts the synthesized paragraphs into a consistent style, comprehensible to students as well as useful to professors. Ultimately, these profiles might compose part of a bulletin for freshman composition, purchased by students and serving as a point of reference for them and teachers alike. But initially the director of composition might present the profiles to the teaching assistants in the workshop, explain the process by which they were created, and clarify their individual details. As the first learning event of the workshop, this presentation might take a half-an-hour to an hour, depending upon the degree of detail that the presenter wishes to achieve.

The graduate students then evaluate two anonymous freshman essays in light of the profiles. (Ideally, each teaching assistant should have his or her own set of profiles.) A letter grade is then assigned to the essay, presumably the one from the profile that most closely describes the essay under scrutiny. Naturally, new teaching assistants will be hesitant and generally unskilled in this exercise. Consequently, they will profit from the leadership of two faculty members — who have also used the profiles to evaluate the essay — during a general discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the essay, of the reasons for matching a specific profile and grade with the essay in question, and of the merits (and demerits) of the profiles. During this forty-five-minute to one-hour discussion, the coordinator of the workshop should assure participants that, at this point, the use of the profiles is not intended to develop a regimented standard for grading freshman essays (although the profiles of course can be employed toward that end at another time). On the contrary, he or she should stress that the evaluation exercises are mainly designed to introduce the teaching assistants to "the language of evaluation" via the profiles, and to concepts that will recur during the workshop.

The remainder of this essay describes several TA workshop topics that the process of evaluation just portrayed can invest with meaning. The topics include essay assignments, patterns of essay development, paragraphing, diction and style, revision, pre-writing, and the syllabus for the freshman composition course. While these topics might be addressed in this order in the workshop, the teaching assistant should be encouraged to devise a different sequence for the classroom (pre-writing, paragraphing, revising, and creating appropriate diction and style would be a sequence more meaningful to the freshman writer). Directly after sessions of essay evaluation in the workshop, however, stimulating essay assignments as well as the patterns of

essay development and paragraphing can be meaningful topics for the graduate.

The five profiles generally progress from statements about content and thesis development through those concerning logical organization, both in the essay as a whole and in special paragraphs of it, to assertions about the relative quality of mechanics, sentence structure, diction, and style. This sequence reflects most teachers' (and all students') belief that an essay should be judged, in the first place, on the originality of its insights, or ideas about a subject, and on the coherent unfolding of the writer's ideas. Considering these priorities in evaluation, workshop topics addressing the devising of stimulating essay assignments and the various patterns of essay development are well-chosen initial ones. Certainly we know that the quality of a student's thinking and writing to some degree reflects the quality of the assignment causing him or her to write. Richard L. Larson has described eleven steps for creative theme assignments that can produce student essays reflected in the "A" profile.¹ After having understood and discussed the merits of these steps, teaching assistants might devise several writing assignments and test them against a group of veteran instructors and sophomores who have passed the freshman course. At this point, an introduction to the various patterns of essay development, especially in combination with one another, is useful because the modes of discourse to which a student resorts while writing are almost always determined by a structure implied in the essay assignment. For example, an essay assignment requiring a student to compare or contrast two ideas will generally elicit an essay exhibiting one of the two basic comparison/contrast strategies, even if the student has not received detailed instruction in this pattern of development.² Frank D'Angelo has revealed that the patterns of essay development are found informing paragraphs and even sentences, mainly because they are ways by which the mind thinks.³ Teaching assistants should be taught that structures in writing follow from primary ways of thinking, and that an excellent essay reflects in its organization the processes of thought expressed in it. Introducing teaching assistants to the concept of generative paragraphing can give them the means for showing students how to achieve the insightful content and logical organization preferred in the profiles of freshman essays.

Generative paragraphing has special virtues as an early focus for the workshop. A quick glance at writing texts for freshmen reveals that many exercises based on the principles of paragraph unity, coherence, and emphasis resemble static games not reflecting the process by which writers actually compose. A more fruitful approach involves teaching students, and TAs, the method for generating paragraphs presented by Francis Christensen.⁴ By diagramming the sentences of a paragraph, writers can see the several levels of generality within the single paragraph, and within a paragraph bloc. By indenting to show the changing relationships of generalities to the specific sentences that clarify them, writers can spatially see which general ideas are equal in value (thus assuring parallel structures for sentences), as well as those places in the paragraph where additional detail is needed. Exposed to Christensen's method, teaching assistants realize that paragraphs can be composed in a related series; not every paragraph requires a topic sentence (some may be transitional). A high-level generalization may actually control the development of several relatively short paragraphs that contain lower-level generalizations which are subpoints of the original generalization. Clearly, Christensen's generative rhetoric offers an ideal way for grasping how a writer logically explores a thought through written discourse.

In the workshop, the coordinator might expose teaching assistants to generative paragraphing through the use of several diagrammed paragraphs, presented either on an overhead projector or through handouts. Other handouts might outline the four or five steps required for students to analyze their paragraphs and begin generating longer, more flexible units of discourse. In an hour, teaching assistants can write a paragraph on a given subject; one can be chosen and diagrammed on a blackboard; and a group discussion can identify the levels of generality within it and those points requiring further explanation.

Making a unit on generative paragraphing an early event in the workshop has several advantages for essay evaluation. (1) It stresses the importance of logical development reflected in the profiles of the "A" and "B" essays. Essay development is best taught in a problem-solving context, in which the student's mind is so engaged in responding to a realistic, and hence meaningful, question that he or she discovers the patterns of paragraph development corresponding to the mode of thought in which the writer is engaged.⁵ (2) By generating paragraphs with an eye to generalities and their relationships, and to the clarifying detail that paragraphs require, students can create the concrete life of an essay. That detailed life is another value appearing in the profiles of successful essays. (3) The student's management of ideas is more likely to be logically coherent and sustained when paragraphing is taught in the manner described above. Thus, generative paragraphing, in combination with problem-solving essay assignments and some instruction in the less instinctive patterns of development, can insure the insightful content and logical development preferred in the profiles of excellent and good student writing.

Next, units on sentence combining, different kinds of diction, and the style appropriate to subject and imagined reader might appear on the workshop agenda. I prefer this order for these subjects. Creating more sophisticated sentences through sentence combining can easily involve the study of necessary principles of grammar, while practice in writing in the low, middle, and high styles introduces students, and many TAs, to an awareness of diction and charged words. Such practice can lead to a more calculated style on the student's part. The study of the different types of grammatical sentences can lead to that of the various types of rhetorical ones — the balanced, loose, mixed, and periodic.

The workshop coordinator might assign rather difficult sentence-combining exercises to the teaching assistants. These can be evaluated and discussed, and the new teachers can be given sets of sentence-combining exercises for students. The coordinator can also distribute handouts of definitions of grammar, diction, rhetoric, and style, along with several examples of appropriate kinds and levels. Finally, selection from known authors can be made available, so that teaching assistants can see rhetoric at work.

After teaching assistants have gained an idea of the whole essay, as well as the major areas of evaluation and their relative importance, they are ready to consider revision. Any freshman essay evaluated in the light of the profiles can be regarded as a draft subject to revision. Revision is best introduced to teaching assistants — not to mention freshman — in systematic phases. Maxine Hairston's four stages of revision in her *Successful Writing* (1981) offer an effective program. A workshop exercise for teaching assistants might consist of the revision of an essay, with a small group of assistants responsible for each stage of the process. The original student essay evaluated might serve as the point of departure. Pre-writing, based on brainstorming and the tag-

memic or dramatistic method, might be handled at this point in the workshop in a similar manner. The coordinator might assign a different method of pre-writing an essay to different groups of teaching assistants.

Finally, each graduate student might create his or her syllabus for the composition course. Rather than being given a departmental syllabus, which they are required to follow mechanically, teaching assistants should incorporate required units of such subjects as grammar, the paragraph, and the whole essay into their own syllabus. Several hours of the workshop might be devoted to the writing of preliminary drafts of the syllabus, with subsequent reviews by the coordinator and his or her assistants. The final two hours of the workshop might consist of a final review and approval of each teaching assistant's syllabus. The coordinator of the workshop should emphasize the ordering of units in the syllabus so that all freshmen have the maximum opportunity to learn the process of writing the essay described in the "A" profile. That opportunity requires teaching such units as pre-writing and revising as early as possible in the course. Writing logically through appropriate patterns of development and generative paragraphing might be linked in the syllabus; they also should most likely appear as early pedagogical units. Instruction in grammar and mechanics need not be an early unit; instead, it can be introduced periodically into the syllabus in such a way that the freshman's usual problems with essay mechanics are addressed by the end of the semester. The teaching of rhetorical sentences can also be delayed until later in the semester.

While ordering principles besides essay evaluation can of course provide rationales for the workshop for teaching assistants, the approach recommended in this essay has the advantage of stressing the reason for being of any freshman writing course — the essay carefully written, revised and thoroughly evaluated.

Notes

¹"Teaching Before We Judge: Planning Assignments in Composition," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, ed. Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 208-19.

²For the two comparison/contrast strategies, see, for example, *Readings for Writers*, ed. Jo Ray McCuen and Anthony C. Winkler, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), pp. 235-36.

³*A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1975), pp. 60, 78-80, 85-88, 92-102, 134-39.

⁴"A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 52-81.

⁵Of course some instruction in classification/division, definition, and comparison/contrast strategies may be necessary, but one should not be arbitrarily selected as the basis for an entire essay.

BOOK REVIEW

The Computer in Composition Instruction: A Writer's Tool.

Edited by William Wresch (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1984).

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William Wresch's collection of essays distinguishes itself from all previous books on computers in writing instruction. Given the nature of their audience — an English profession still largely computer-illiterate and computer-phobic — earlier texts were necessarily introductory in approach, non-technical in language, and arranged in the manner of "how to" manuals: how to set up a computer lab; how to evaluate and purchase hardware/software; how to "boot up" a floppy disk; what *is* a floppy disk. And they were lacking in one crucial area: description of *quality* software, software already commercially available and capable of improving our students' writing. A teacher may have learned from such texts how to boot up a disk, but the software thus loaded would probably have been of small pedagogic value — most likely a drill-and-practice program in grammar. Software in composition instruction has yet to reach maturity. But it has reached a promising adolescence, and Wresch's book, more than any other currently available, introduces the best of this young and growing software to our field.

In place of the "how to" manual, then, Wresch has gathered together thirteen essays by prominent writing teachers — and they are writing teachers *before* computer programmers, as he stresses in his introduction — describing the software they have developed for composition; and often the programs described are works-in-progress, still being refined and field-tested. Each essay outlines the aims and structure of one program, explaining its genesis and its uses in the lab or classroom. And most of the essays end with suggestions for future research. Every kind of application to writing instruction is represented, from grammar drills (COMP-LAB) and word processors to prewriting and invention programs (TOPOI and SEEN are among the best known here), to programs for stylistics analysis (HOMER and Writer's Workbench), to programs integrating all these functions into a fully automated writing environment (WANDAH and Wordsworth II). Anyone who has followed the development of this technology will recognize the names of these programs; their authors — among other contributors to this collection — will be equally familiar: Michael Southwell, Hugh Burns, Helen Schwartz, Michael Cohen and Richard Lanham, Kathleen Kiefer and Charles Smith, Ruth Von Blum, Cynthia Selfe. The result is a book that truly presents the state of computerized instruction in writing, as envisioned by its pioneers. Though the book does not avoid technical discussions, it is clearly written and accessible to the novice — and thus allows all members of our field, the uninitiated and expert, those uncommitted to computer-assisted instruction as well as committed users, to examine at once the entire range of composition software, and judge its usefulness to pedagogy.

This is an innovative and potentially a very influential collection; anyone interested in writing instruction should be equally interested in this text. Paradoxically, though, the innovative for-