MOVING OUT: FROM SUBJECTIVE TO OBJECTIVE COMPOSITION
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At the recent SCETC meeting in Jacksonville, Florida, we gave a paper on a writing program for community college students based on adaptations of principles and techniques proposed by James Moffett and Ken Macrorie. We have borrowed from both of these authors as we developed our own composition course, and we have experienced encouraging results.

Succinctly summarized, our course, as it presently exists, involves a sequential writing program that is based on a premise put forth by James Moffett in Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston, 1968). Moffett suggests that a student's cognitive growth moves in the direction of higher abstracting: "The hypothesis is that speaking, writing, and reading in forms of discourse that are successively more abstract makes it possible for the learner to understand better what is entailed at each stage of the hierarchy, to relate one stage to another, and thus to become aware of how he and others create information and ideas" (25). In applying this premise to the development of a curriculum for our freshman composition course, we have built a progression of writing assignments which move from the very egocentric or subjective to the very public or objective. Since an important measure of the student's progress is based on his ability to deal with increasingly abstract -- objective -- writing situations, a key or central moment in the course is when the student makes the transition from subjective composition to objective composition. In our experience, the movement has not taken place suddenly or at a particular "key" moment. But rather, it has come about in successive stages through a structured series of writing situations, within the total writing program, designed to encourage the student writer to decenter.

While there may not be a "key" moment in the progression, a key to the transition is a consciousness of abstraction. As both Piaget and Moffett argue, the writer must displace the self in order to break through his own egocentrism, and in doing so, he is no longer constrained by either a particular physical vantage point in space and time or by his subjective preferences. (Moffett, p. 148). A conscious awareness of one's subjectivity is the first stage in the movement toward objective or abstract forms of composition.

To provide a context in which this awareness can develop, a number of strategies have been successful for us. In our course, the earliest writing assignments place almost total emphasis upon the writer's subjective reactions. Beginning with free writing, in which the student records an interior monologue or a stream of consciousness, the writer not only deals with the subject matter subjectively, but also becomes his own audience. Like a child learning to deal with the phenomenological world, he finds himself in the student writer becomes consciously aware of the nature of subjectivity through these early writing situations. This awareness, it seems to us, is a prerequisite for understanding objectivity. And further, the process of abstracting from experience for an audience is relatively less complex when the writer and the audience are one and the same person. Later, as the emphasis shifts from the speaker as audience to the external or public reader as audience, an explicit step toward objectivity takes place.

Implicit in this shift of audience is a shift in person: a change from the first person "I" to the third person "he". Initiates a decentering through which the writer more consciously stands back from the phenomena he records. The difference between autobiographical and biographical writing exemplifies this point. Next, a shift in tense from the present to the past moves him from the immediate recording of a particular moment to recording in reflection about this moment. Clearly, more than the perception of phenomena is operative at this point since the writer must select and reorganize, or abstract, from memory to record that which has passed.

A specific example from our course will help clarify these points. The three decentering strategies described above, which are implicitly introduced in the early writing assignments of the course -- free writing, focused free writing, and impressionistic descriptions are explicitly brought together in a series of writing situations based on the film version of Shirley Jackson's The Lottery (Encyclopedia Britannica Films). The film is shown twice, in two successive class meetings. After the first showing, the student is asked to write free, giving a subjective, gut response to the film. Before the second showing the student is asked to assume the role of a disinterested observer, i.e., a newspaper reporter assigned to cover the event depicted. In this role the student is encouraged to give an accurate account of what takes place rather than his subjective response, as called for in the first writing situation. The obvious result is a consciousness of both the shift from subjective to objective writing and the concomitant shift from speaker as audience to reader as audience. The shifts required in tense and person subtly underscore the gains in consciousness. A further step in the progression calls for a third writing situation in which the student evaluates what he has seen. Here, therefore, must generalize about the raw phenomena, the events of the film, in terms of judgmental values that are by their very nature higher level abstractions.

While our example uses a film adaptation of a short story, the subject matter for writing situations of this type can come from a variety of literary and non-literary sources.

Although the strategies outlined above evolved in the context of a college transfer composition course, the fundamental premise and the progression and techniques of its implementation seem to us to have universal application.

New CLEP Test
Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton has announced that a new CLEP Freshman English Subject Examination will soon be available. According to Albert Seiling, Program Director for CLEP, the test will be normed this spring and will be available nationally through CLEP test centers in October or November 1973.

Working in conjunction with test specialists in the ETS Humanities Department, the following committee of examiners prepared the test: Richard Braddock (University of Iowa), Walker Gibson (University of Massachusetts), Marriana Davis (Benedict College), and Greg Cowan (Forest Park Community College).

According to ETS, the new test, which will be a 90-minute objective examination, "is designed to measure, so far as such a test can, a candidate's ability to recognize and apply principles of good writing. This examination does not require a wide acquaintance with rhetorical or grammatical terms, though it does require some. More important, it attempts to test sensitivity in reading and in manipulating language, on the assumption that these activities are closely related to good writing. Finally, the optional essay section of the test offers the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate writing skills in sustained responses to varied instructions and given circumstances." This 90-minute optional essay is given only when a college requires that an essay be submitted. It is evaluated by the college, not by ETS.

Concerning the objective examination, Mr. Seiling writes: "The examination is not designed merely to reward mastery of Standard English, but rather to present the candidate with writing and editorial tasks at different levels of usage, calling for an appreciation of what is appropriate language for different circumstances, and audiences."
TRAINING TA’s—INVOLVING THE ENTIRE DEPARTMENT

William E. Carpenter
SUNY at Stony Brook

My problem is a familiar one: how to train and supervise fifty or so TA’s without burdening myself and a few former friends with the enormous tasks of observing fifty classes, helping TA’s learn how to teach composition, and consoling the frightened beginners. At Stony Brook we do not have a “freshman committee” to do these jobs. Instead, the Director of Freshman English is also chairman of what we call the “Committee on Teaching Trainees” — a euphemism for the entire Department. As chairman of this “committee” I have the power to impress into service as many faculty members as needed to assist in training our graduate students to be effective teachers. (Actually, my colleagues are not at all reluctant to help; in fact, many are eager to sign on.)

At the beginning of every semester I assign each TA — new or experienced — to a faculty member, the student’s mentor for the term. Each mentor is given no more than two TA’s to work with and in many cases only one. At the end of the semester I ask the mentor to submit a brief assessment of the “trainee’s” progress, his strengths, his weaknesses, his performance in the classroom.

When I first began the mentor program two years ago my colleagues were a little confused about what they were being asked to do. Some saw themselves as Department spies or “hit men”; others felt that when they had observed a class their contribution to the improvement of undergraduate instruction was complete; others were eager to help trainees with their teaching but were not quite sure how to go about it. This year when faculty members received a notice assigning them a TA, they also received this description of what is expected of them as mentor-observers:

MEMORANDUM
FROM: William E. Carpenter, Director of Freshman Composition
HERE, at the request of several faculty members, is an attempt to define and clarify the role of the mentor-observer in the training of our TA’s.

Our TA’s need supervised training by experienced and successful faculty members; we should not assume, I think, that teaching skills will develop by themselves. Each TA, therefore, will be assigned to a mentor, and new TA’s will enroll in my Practicum in the Teaching of Composition. The long-range purpose of both the Practicum and the mentor program is to help our graduate students realize their potentials as teachers; the more immediate purpose is to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction.

As we work with the trainees, we should keep in mind two questions:

What does a TA need to know to perform well the duties we assign him/her? How can we help the TA evaluate and improve his/her own teaching?

I. Observation

The general role of the mentor is to assist the TA in assessing and improving his own teaching by providing him with feedback and response, a sense of perspective. Observation is, then, quite important, not so much for the purpose of judging performance, which should be played down, but for helping the TA clarify his own teaching objectives and attitudes. An effective critique of a class visit depends, of course, on the observer’s ability to report accurately and in detail what he saw and heard, even to the point of noting down verbatim exchanges between students and teacher.

Before visiting a class the mentor will want to find out from the TA what text he will be using and what he plans to do with it. Then after each class visit (and ideally there should be several during a semester), the mentor should discuss the visit with the TA. As he explains to the TA what he has observed, the mentor might keep in mind these questions:

1. What kind of questions did the TA ask? Vague? Rhetorical?
   Questions that contained their own answers?
2. Were the questions answerable by reasoning from the evidence available to the class, or were they merely a guessing game for the students, the object being to guess the answer in the teacher’s mind? Were questions part of a sustained line of inquiry?
3. How many students responded to questions and took part in discussions? Were they grouped in any pattern? Did they all sit together? Did the TA encourage reluctant and different students to take part in discussions?
4. How did the TA respond to students’ observations and answers?
   Was he open and receptive? Sarcastic, abrupt? Did he respond at all? Did he encourage students to push their answers beyond the level of cliche, received truths, and spilled emotion?
5. How effective and thorough was the presentation of the textual material? Did the TA show good understanding of the material? Did he make it interesting? Did he make the readings seem pertinent to the general aim of the course — improving students’ reading and writing?

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the TA’s personal method or teaching technique? (This is a tricky thing to judge, but a staple comment on this point is invaluable. Obviously what we want to do is encourage individualism while avoiding solipsism and insuring communication, showing each TA how he can become the best teacher he is capable of becoming.) Related to this question are questions dealing with use of the teaching aids (blackboard, dittoes, etc.) position in the class, general demeanor, and the TA’s sense of the dynamics of the class.

These discussions should help the TA gain confidence in what he does. He should not think that observation is a form of spying.

II. Counseling

The TA and Mentor should meet throughout the semester for an ongoing discussion about teaching. Not only do our trainees need advice about the classroom, they need help in analyzing and evaluating student writing, formulating writing assignments, and preparing readings. Many teachers of composition were, for obvious reasons, exempted from taking such a course when they were freshmen; they have no model to work toward or against.

Most of our TA’s lack a way of looking at and talking about student writing. Writing which TA needs is a grammar, a rhetoric, or a theory of style that will allow him to explain to a student why a sentence or a paragraph succeeds or fails. We should expect TA’s to do more for the student than simply put a B on the paper and a terminal note saying, “Nice job. Work for greater precision.” Also, marking papers with “awk,” “agree,” “sp.” and other hieroglyphs does not profit students or teachers. Unfortunately too many TA’s resort to generalizations, hieroglyphs, and pointing out obvious errors because they don’t know how to explain such matters as tone, faulty predication, subordination, or passive voice. They become mere proofreaders. They need factual information, the kind found in handbooks, not in order to teach it directly to the freshmen, but because this knowledge can help the teachers understand what their students are doing (or not doing).

Mentors should examine one or more sets of papers that the TA has marked and then make suggestions about how to annotate and evaluate them. Some TA’s probably need to be reminded of the importance of praise in grading papers; pointing out to the freshman what he has done right or well may prove more beneficial (especially at the beginning of the semester) than flinging a lot of red ink at the errors he made. TA’s should strive for comments that are constructive. Such comments will not only indicate the nature of the student’s errors or difficulties but offer some clues as to how he can begin to modify them. It does no good to tell a student his writing is vague or incoherent without offering some particular suggestions about how he may make it more precise or ordered.

Some TA’s, especially inexperienced ones, have difficulty making up successful writing assignments. Mentors should help plan and criticize a few assignments before the TA presents them to his class. Bad assignments, bad writing. I encourage TA’s to plan every theme assignment with great care before presenting it to the students; to decide whether a highly structured or an unstructured assignment.
is better; to identify the activities and operations of mind the student must engage in to complete the assignment; to make every assignment part of a sequential course in composition.

In discussions of readings (texts) the mentor can show the TA how to ask inclusive questions and how to make insightful connections between works. Especially do TA's need help in dealing with expository essays. They tend to abstract one or two key ideas from the text and then lead a discussion about those ideas. They need help in learning how to analyze the style, structure, logic, and rhetoric of an essay.

III. Experiments

I would like to see mentors experiment with team teaching, master and apprentice working together to prepare materials, then presenting them in the classroom as a team. Similarly, a mentor could take over a class for the TA and demonstrate the pedagogical ideas he has been explaining. TA's badly need to observe experienced composition teachers at work. Both these experiments could prove exciting and valuable for the TA.

IV. Conclusions

Clearly what I'm requesting is that mentors take a very active role in training our Teaching Assistants, not the merely passive role of observer. We need not trouble ourselves too much about being uniform in our theories of teaching composition. Many mentors have strong opinions about composition; others have never even taught it themselves (7). During their teaching careers here, our TA's should encounter a wide variety of theories, attitudes, and schemes for making freshmen write well or for interesting students in poetry, fiction, and drama. I suppose we want to make them conscious of the assets and liabilities of the way they teach and of other possible ways of teaching without making them too self-conscious and constrained.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH

[A continuation from the last issue of a question and answer series with three English editors: Richard Welna (Scott, Foreman), Tom Gay (John Wiley), and Jane Ross (Holt, Rinehart, Winston).]

QUESTION: Does your experience as an editor suggest that the so-called "fragmentation" of Freshman English has been as severe as many believe? If it has occurred, do you think it will continue, or do you feel that some re-trenching, some return to a common ground will eventually take place?

GAY: There is no doubt in my mind that the "fragmentation" of Freshman English has been severe.

This fragmentation is proving to be a very difficult thing for textbook publishers to live with. Certainly we are not able to do as good a job as we once did because of the way as much service as we were once able. In schools where each instructor is allowed individual choice, it is almost impossible for any publisher's salesman to sell textbooks, inform him of new and forthcoming books. When there is no committee, we find that we must present an enormous number of examination copies (this adds appreciably to the cost of the book).

The fragmentation also makes it more difficult for an editor to get a feel for what the market needs. I find myself walking away from a campus after a day of interviews thinking—well, there is one instructor using short novels, another teaching a course on

There are several advantages to this mentor system in addition to the first one that comes to mind—my sanity. First, a productive mentor-TA relationship can improve teaching. Less important, but very useful, the mentor reports provide a more detailed picture of the teaching qualifications, preparation, and effectiveness of our Ph.D. graduates than any other method I have tried. Now when I write a letter of recommendation for a TA in which I describe his training, I can refer to specific details in the statements from his mentors, supplying prospective employers with information I could not possibly obtain on my own. It is possible, after all, for a TA to have worked with as many as six mentors during his three years of graduate work. This gives me six different views of his teaching, and gives him as many sources of advice and assistance. (Let me hasten to explain that I do not keep "secret files" on TA's; on the contrary, I encourage mentors to be quite candid with "mentees" about their observations and assessments. Furthermore, if a TA wants to look at his record, I am happy to go over it with him.)

Our Department derives another benefit from this program, a bonus I like very much. This program, which is still evolving, brings the faculty and the TA staff together to work on common goals and problems. It helps end the separation that exists between us and them, between those who teach "upper level" (therefore "important") courses from those who do the "service" (therefore "less important") courses. It integrates the Department. It wakes up professors who have not taught composition in years to an awareness of the tremendous task we ask new teachers to perform.

Yet, it makes the most of the great variety of styles, approaches, and talents a large, healthy department has by focusing all the accumulated experience of the faculty on teaching composition and teaching teachers.

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the course know how to write (in addition to being experts on science fiction or whatever). Freshman English teachers will probably have little choice but to draw the wagons in a circle. I hear some rumors that students are now demanding more traditional courses in composition and literature, but they're hard to assess at this point. I also hear some complaints that Freshman English is now going to go back to being exactly what it was twenty years ago. It may be that we're in for a truly reactionary period. But I think there may also be signs that Freshman English is in the process of developing a new and more vital sense of itself.

ROSS: Working in English, it's hard any more even to know what is meant by fragmentation — it's such an established way of thinking. Many courses will want handbooks and readers, others just readers, readers/rhetorics, rhetoric/readers, many will make freshman English an intro to lit course. This I wouldn't call fragmentation and these books account for a substantial part of the market.

But the remaining percentage of the market will probably become increasingly wild and may capture some from the stable center. Here we'll see more teaching from TV; with film, about media; more using newspapers as the reader, individual conferences and contract grading, accountability and lab work, etc.

In short, I think the center will hold, although its character will become more contemporary and more flexible.

REFLECTIONS OF AN EDITOR
William F. Irwin
University of Washington

I write these reflections as I move toward the end of my nine-year period as editor of College Composition and Communication. I assumed the editorship in 1964 and published my first issue in February 1965. In the intervening years, I have read literally thousands of manuscripts from instructors and professors from every kind of school in the country — from the most prestigious to the most modest — and have published possibly something like 15% of the total material submitted. With this background and perspective, therefore, I would like to comment upon Freshman English itself and upon the people who typically teach and direct it. It may be foolish to undertake generalizations of this kind, but the attempt may be useful to some who have come fairly recently to the ranks.

First of all, because Freshman English is a beginning college course and a continuation of the required English sequence in high school, the nature of its offerings has always been affected by the admissions policies of the college as a whole and by the needs of those students who are admitted. Open admissions policies inevitably invite more basic programs; including remedial classes; high selection permits more sophisticated work, possibly even the elimination of a course that emphasizes basic skills only. In a thirty-year period, from about 1943 to the present, many four-year schools have moved from mass admissions policies in the 40s and 50s to more selective ones in the 60s and then to modified selective ones in the late 60s and early 70s. This cycle does not represent a full circling — returning to a point where we began, but rather a spiral, returning to a similar situation under different circumstances.

The most significant change in the educational scene between 1945 and 1973 has been the growth of community colleges throughout the country. Their existence made possible selective admissions in state schools. The two-year colleges not only inherited those students who were excluded by selection policies, but opened their doors to other students whom the four-year schools had never encountered.

The social upheaval of the late 60s caused the latest shift. Some universities have again declared open admissions; others have adopted special admissions procedures for minority students. The impact of all of this is that Freshman English has been called upon again, not to weed out as it too often was tacitly expected to do in the past, but to find survival techniques for students who are now admitted.

Reflection: The shift in emphasis from "weeding out" to "keeping alive" makes quite a difference. It makes a difference not only in an instructor's attitudes, but in his approaches. Remedial programs in the past were largely unsuccessful, I think, because the assumption was all too evident that if students failed they could simply go away. No one asked where or cared particularly. Drill and workbooks were stock resources. From what I can determine, students being admitted today differ completely from those whom we labeled "remedial" in the past. They do not respond — and do not intend to respond — to former practices. Community colleges probably learned that first. They did not simply adopt the approaches that four-year schools had used; they responded to a new challenge. Probably some of the most innovative and helpful methods of teaching have come from a new brand of instructor who is not willing to dismiss these students as unteachable. The search for solutions in teaching basic English is a whole new area of investigation; the verdict on experimental programs begun four or five years ago is yet to come.

In considering Freshman English further, we have to take into account the rather typical circumstances under which a Freshman English program is conducted in most schools. I would estimate that 50% or more of the people teaching Freshman English throughout the country at any particular point in time have less than three years' experience. And if we go up the experience scale — five years, ten years, fifteen years — the number in each category would show a sharp drop. This estimate is based upon the fact that many programs are staffed almost exclusively by teaching assistants, and if full-time faculty members participate, Freshman English remains for them an apprenticeship from which they attempt to graduate as soon as possible. This is a situation that to my knowledge has not changed, nor do the teaching programs of community college instructors significantly alter the observation.

Reflection: Even though the youth and inexperience of Freshman English instructors have been often cited as a weakness of the program, particularly when one considers that students have probably studied most recently in their senior year under the most experienced high school teachers, I would maintain that the very best teaching today in Freshman English is being done by young assistants. As is all things, there are exceptions. But we are dealing in generalizations. I have several reasons for making this assertion.

First of all, experience increases everyone's resourcefulness, but knowing the ropes is not necessarily the major factor in making a good writing instructor. An identification between instructor and student is essential, however. If a student perceives that his instructor is concerned, sensitive, encouraging, and perceptive, he will try to write for him and he will in all likelihood develop. A good instructor teaches writing best not by telling what he knows, but by building the self-confidence of students in themselves. Believing this is not an excuse for tossing out the rhetoric/handbook, as some instructors do; knowing the resources and strategies of language is surely one way of gaining confidence. But what I am saying is that texts do not serve alone. An instructor must be more than an interpreter of rhetoric; he must be a rhetorician himself who knows how to join his interests and the student's interests together in helping the student realize more fully his potential as a thinker and writer. I daily see young assistants and Freshman students working together in successful ways that I, despite my thirty years of experience, cannot emulate. They are doing a better job in the Freshman English classroom than I am, chiefly because they are younger. They may be doing what they are doing for the first time, but most of them are excited about what they are doing. And that is important.

Yet, though I find myself incapable of their youthful brand of excitement, I am not advocating euthanasia for those who fall into my category. As an experienced person, I think

CORRECTION
In the Winter issue, Richard Welna, English Editor for Scott, Foresman was quoted (p. 2, col. 1) as saying "Textbooks seem to be in a decline." What Mr. Welna said was "Textbook seems to be in a decline." He still believes in textbooks! Our apologies.
I still have an important function in the total scheme of things. My estimate of the relative inexperience of the faculty teaching in Freshman English may be coupled with a similar one about those who direct Freshman English programs. Directors tend to be transient in the job—after several reasons, I think. Some people assume the job for the wrong reasons: they want authority or a quick promotion or entree to a more prestigious administrative appointment. Others are willing to assume the job for a time as a necessary departmental chore. In one category or the other, directors of this variety are not fully committed to the study of composition as a process as other professors are committed to their specialties in literature and language. In short, they are not scholars of their discipline. Unfortunately, those who stay in directorships for ten or more years are in short number throughout the country.

Reflection: If I had to point to a serious weakness in the structure of Freshman English throughout the country, it would be in the shortage of experienced leadership. An inexperienced staff must at least have knowledgeable direction. One observation I can make from my own editorial experience is that there are people who constantly write articles about well-established principles and procedures—but one could call the clichés of the profession—and write them as if they were discoveries, being thought of for the first time. To these people, their findings are new. But they have not learned a fundamental tenet of good scholarship: it is hardly possible to discover new ground if one does not even know what is established territory.

In January 1967, Frank Koen and Stanford C. Eriksen published a special report entitled "An Analysis of the Specific Features Which Characterize the More Successful Programs for the Recruitment and Training of College Teachers." The project was supported by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and sponsored by the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan. I quote one passage from p. 48 of that report:

Two administrative factors appear to be crucial to the establishment and continuance of training programs: (a) The active involvement of senior members of the faculty who command the professional respect of their colleagues and who stand in positions of influence. (b) The commitment of individual faculty members who have the interest and capacity to serve as effective administrators of the training program. Sometimes these two roles are combined in the same individual (most often the chairman) but in large departments, they tend to be separated.

I concur strongly with this statement. The quality of Freshman English programs, which are usually the support of TA training pro-

grams, is directly proportionate to the quality and experience of the leadership. When this principle is ignored, programs suffer.

In 1965, in "Themes, Theories, and Theory: The Teaching of Writing in College," Albert Kitzhaber wrote about "the confusion exhibited in the [Freshman English] course—a widespread uncertainty about aims, a bewildering variety of content, a frequent lack of progression within the course." That statement has often been repeated as a fact. It isn't a fact, of course; it is an interpretation. I could not accept it when it first appeared. I have not learned to accept it in the intervening ten years. What Kitzhaber observed then—and the situation is undoubtedly more pronounced today than ever before—is the pluralism and diversity of Freshman English courses throughout the country. Whether that is bewildering confusion and uncertainty is another question. I have not seen anyone lamenting the diversity of literature surveys, courses in the novel, grammar courses, or courses in the history of the language, yet I am sure the pluralism of objectives and approaches in these courses would be equally bewildering to anyone who characteristically thinks that there is virtue in sameness.

Reflection: What has been central in almost all Freshman English courses that I have known and read about is writing itself, and the single most important objective of these courses has been to help students develop their writing skills. From that central core, everything else diverges. The ways of writing are many; the ways of teaching writing are many. Those who advocate monolithic structures seem to me to defeat what has been a very source of strength in the teaching of Freshman English. Freshman English does not represent a situation where many people simply do not know what they are doing at all. It is a situation where many people, even inexperienced ones, are constantly seeking better ways of responding to the ever changing nature of life styles and ways of thinking. Writing is a form of behavior that reflects the total self. Thus I cannot teach students in 1975 as I taught them in 1965 or 1943. However, because I do not do the same thing today that I did yesterday does not mean that I did not know what I was doing on either day. Each day brings its own solution in a writing class. Perhaps all I am saying is that I have learned much about writing in thirty years, and learning means changing.

I know of no course in the college curriculum that has been as responsive to change and current interest as Freshman English has. I know of no course that has been more constantly re-thought and re-evaluated—not out of frustration, I would maintain, but out of an honest concern to keep Freshman English viable. Where this has not been done, the course has fallen into dull disrespectability. I see no reason for unified consensus about the nature of these courses.

I am regularly depressed by the attempts of some individuals to get everyone to think alike, mainly, to think as they do. One of the things I tried desperately not to do as editor was to think of CCC as my journal, in the sense that what I published would be only what I agreed with. I have published some articles that I could not possibly subscribe to, but I thought they were honestly set forth and represented views that needed to be known. Some people seem terrified of divergent views. To me, divergence becomes a test of my own beliefs and values. Sometimes I hold fast; sometimes I give way when holding fast seems meaningless. What we need in NCTB and CCC, I am convinced, is not more "unanimous" resolutions, but more tolerance of informed, thoughtful individualists.

I am immensely pleased with some of the individual work and findings of the last ten years, particularly new understandings and explications of the prewriting process, personal voice, levels of generality, paragraph structure, varieties of English, the importance of audience, linguistic approaches to style, non-linear techniques, multi-media communication, and multiple informal, oblique approaches to writing that at the present time at least seem to work far more effectively than formal direct ones. This is surely only a partial list, things that simply occur to me at this moment without a systematic review of a decade of my involvement with writings about composition. I see none of this as criticism. I see the diversity as a healthy sign that Freshman English is alive and well.

The final point I would like to comment upon is the current rumor that Freshman English will surely die if it is dropped as a requirement. I think no course dies if, as I have described above, it has the capacity to revitalize itself. I need not add that living death is one of the paradoxical states of existence. Obviously, some things expire before they die; Freshman English can be sustained by a requirement and yet be lifeless. On an optional status, it has to find ways to survive. I think we know already from enough cases throughout the country that dropping the requirement does not necessarily spell doom. Doom is the result only of indifferent leadership and limited vision.

I have always maintained—in part facetiously, in part not—that as long as the Puritan strain persists in the American character, Freshman English will survive. People who do not even need the course will take it because they think it is good for them. They may not be able to verbalize what it is good for, but I sense that subconsciously many individuals seek the self-assurance and self-fulfillment, even the power, that they know effective expression can bring. Finding a voice is often discovering one's self. Non-writers in the educational world are partially
HRW1973-FOR YOU.
We all thought about it a long time. You've had topical and thematic readers and reader/rhetorics before. You like them. They work. But what theme? For the 1970s, forever, we think the theme is HUMAN WORTH.

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Now we'll all give it to all of you. We're very pleased with it; we're very enthusiastic about it. We hope you'll like it.

HUMAN WORTH

Richard Paul Janaro, Darwin Gearhart
Organized around considerations of aspects of human worth, this is a collection of 32 essays, 12 short stories, 44 poems, and one play. Topical and traditional subjects—man vs. civilization, moral absolutism vs. relativism—are treated seriously and provocatively—but at a level accessible to most students. The book is organized to progress from concentration on immediate concerns of education, sex roles, family structures to wider concerns such as power vs. the individual and the individual vs. the culture into very broad considerations concerning the nature of man.

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| Wilfred A. Ferrell and Nicholas A. Salerno, Arizona State University | Ray Fabrizio, Edith Karas, Ruth Mennum
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| Nearly all of the 70 essays on contemporary problems in this edition are new. Each of the six major sections has at least one controversial essay, with a responding essay or a chapter from a controversial book (followed by a favorable and an unfavorable review), and one thematically relevant short story. Each major section has an introduction and each selection is preceded by a short biography of the author and followed by study questions for analysis of the context, method, and approach of the selection. | THE RHETORIC OF YES is a collection of experiences in affirmation, varied in subject and treatment, coming out of other times and cultures as well as our own. It suggests directions toward rediscovery of human responsibilities, and a reaffirmation of life as an alternative to apathy and violence. Ranging from the light-hearted to the serious, these 43 essays, 15 stories, and 45 poems explore such values as freedom, justice, survival, growth, faith, love, pleasure, culture, and community. Four tables of contents are offered so that a course may be structured around rhetoric, subject matter, genre, or theme. A 96 page instructor's manual is available. |
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After my nine years as an editor, I could easily write another dissertation on naivete, incompetence, superficiality, misguided experiments, commercialism, and even illiteracy in the profession. I choose not to do that because I do not see these as characteristic of the vast numbers of instructors who teach the course responsibly and well. By nature, I am not an easy optimist, but now more than ever before, I find myself a firm believer in Freshman English and its capacity to be one of the most valuable courses in a student’s college career. Its value, however, does not come about accidentally. It happens only when intelligent and interested men and women continue to give their best resources to a course that they themselves also believe in.

ACCOUNTABILITY: WHY NOT FOR STUDENTS?

By Lawrence Bell

Tarrant County Junior College

The Doctrine of Accountability appears to have acquired a status among some urban community colleges approximately equal to that of the Doctrine of Grace among Christians. Among administrators of the larger, more progressive community colleges, there has been a positive “Rouche” to get on the bandwagon. The most essential meaning of Accountability is that everyone is answerable to someone for the quality of the performance of his appointed tasks. Along with the current emphasis on Accountability comes an equally heavy emphasis on Evaluation, for it is but a truism that if there is to be Accountability, there must first be an evaluation of performance.

But the most intriguing thing about the current emphasis on Accountability is that it is not applied to students. In fact many classroom instructors are gleaming the distinct impression that to hold students strictly accountable for their academic performance and their personal behavior while on campus is frowned upon and considered reactionary by many in the vanguard of the community college movement. Hopefully, the impression is false and not well grounded; but it is a strong impression and widely shared by the teaching faculty.

Over the past couple of years, even as Accountability was becoming the reigning concept, there has been developing a significant movement toward the avoidance of evaluating students’ performance and assigning grades to it. The pass/fail or credit/no credit systems have never had more advocates or more friends in court. The deadline for dropping a course without penalty, regardless of performance, has been moved back almost to the final exam. The giving of Incompletes has been liberalized greatly. Teachers are told—often by high-priced visiting consultants—that all student failures are their own personal failures. Students never fail; only teachers do. It is only the rare faculty member who today would dare to correct a student’s personal behavior on campus, whether he be using foul language on the mall or be engaged in heavy petting in the hallway.

The trend seems to be toward the curious position of regarding it as reasonable and fair to hold the Board strictly accountable to the public for the overall condition of the district, to hold the administration strictly accountable to the Board for the quality of administration, to hold the faculty strictly accountable to the administration for teaching effectiveness, but to hold the students accountable to no one for much of anything. If Accountability is good for everyone else in higher education, why is it bad for students?

This reluctance to hold students to any very specific or very high standards of performance and behavior is especially odd when considered in the context of our society’s recent attempts to recognize college students as adults. At age 18 a person is now legally considered mature enough to be drafted or to volunteer for military service, to vote or marry. If he botches any one of these, he has to live with the consequences. Yet apparently on many community college campuses, some administrators and faculty members wish to continue to treat students as children and to excuse them from the consequences of their poor performance or non-performance.

It is precisely the point of this paper to suggest that Evaluation and Accountability are good ideas and that they should be rigorously applied to students’ academic performance and to their personal behavior while on campus. This is more than just a good idea; it is a positive, affirmative duty of any institution of higher education. Whether one likes it or not, we do live in a competitive society in which our students will be evaluated and held accountable to several different masters: employers, different governments, mates and peer groups of various types. We are not preparing them to live in this society by lowering our standards or excusing them from the consequences of poor performance or non-performance. In the long run, we do them a definite disservice by letting them off easy.

Experience teach us that failure in some things is a part of life. Psychologists teach us that learning to tolerate a certain amount of failure and to react constructively to it is essential to the development of good mental and emotional health. Moreover, the very essence of maturity or adulthood is making one’s own decisions, accepting the consequences of one’s actions, and boldly standing responsible for them. Are these the attitudes we are fostering by the current trends toward relaxation of the standards for academic performance and personal behavior? Clearly, we are not.

It is a fair question to ask, “Well, what exactly would you have us do here and now?”

First, we who teach should raise our academic standards, not lower them. This is most needed in regard to the awarding of A’s and B’s, which are in danger of becoming meaningless in some areas due to the ease by which they are obtained. We also need to admit without embarrassment that some students, despite our very best efforts, simply will not put forth sufficient effort to earn passing grades. As adults, these students must accept the consequences of their lack of effort. We teachers must quit bowing to the myth that an F or WF is a punitive grade vindictively assigned by a malicious teacher. It is rather a symbol awarded as a result of a professional judgment that a given student has not performed a specific responsibility at even a minimal acceptable level. If a teacher does not have enough professional self-confidence to make that judgment, he is in the wrong profession. So long as the task and its objectives have been made clear along with the methods and criteria of evaluation, the teacher has an affirmative duty to make his evaluation and to render a professional judgment. And the student must accept the consequences of his performance. That is accountability!

Secondly, the administration must not become inordinately concerned that a teacher may have awarded a significant number of D’s, F’s, W’s and WPs unless that number is consistently and unreasonably high. What is reasonable? Undoubtedly it varies among courses and programs. In the social sciences some take it as a rule-of-thumb that an effective teacher usually ought to be able to get 70% of his students to complete the course with a grade of C or better, based on his total 12th day student load. Above all we must reject the in-vogue canard that “students never fail; only teachers do.” Any classroom teacher encounters some students who seem almost hell-bent and determined to flunk; and some refuse to be salvaged. If students have a right to be treated as adults, then they have the responsibility to perform acceptably or to be adjudged failures.

Thirdly, if regular attendance at a formal class and/or the completion of a term-paper and/or outside projects or packaged instructional units are required for completion of a course, and if this is made clear at the outset of the course, then the instructor should rigorously and equitably enforce these requirements. The students must be evaluated and judged on their performance. That is not only Accountability, but from the viewpoint of the other students it is also Equal Protection of the Law!

Finally, in regard to any of our school policies affecting student behavior on campus, as long as those policies remain in effect and are clearly stated for all to see, we should not be embarrassed or reluctant to enforce them. Constant reexamination of our policies may well be advisable; but as long as our policies are clearly stated, enforcement of them is merely the application of the Doctrine of Accountability.
The following two letters were written in reply to Jim Corder's review article "On Two Writing Texts, English Past, and a Fence for My Garden," which appeared in the Winter, 1973 issue of this newsletter.

To the Editor:

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on Jim Corder's comments on my textbook: Twenty Questions for the Writer (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), which were printed in the Winter 1973 issue of FRESHMAN ENGLISH NEWS. I am indeed pleased that Mr. Corder thought highly of the book: that it is "well designed," and "thoughtful"; that it will serve the student well ("...the tools are all there and any student who worked his way through...would be well fitted, enlarged"); and that it will serve the instructor also ("A teacher who uses the text seriously will not be left in doubt whether or not there is a subject matter for freshman English.") Mr. Corder is quite right when he says that I "wish to aid the student in the acquisition of skill," and that I "see the possibility as best realized in the accumulation of a repertoire of capacities." Toward that purpose I have, as Mr. Corder further notes, provided twenty questions ("The writer inevitably begins with a question," I say in my Preface, "The book is rooted in this observation and the chapters are titled accordingly"), plus some 60 exercises and 110 essays.

Yes, the book is rich in resources: I happily plead guilty on that score: far more resources than any single instructor would draw on during any single term. Why this troubles Mr. Corder I cannot say: I personally was taught never to look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth. But it does trouble him somehow. For after his lavish praise of the text — like the cow who filled the pail to overflowing with rich creamy milk, only to kick it over at the end — he says that actually it is too thorough; that anyone who took the text in "utter seriousness" would collapse along the way trying "to perform all its tasks." Well he's right: anyone who approached the text with such grim and dogged seriousness, indeed compulsion, might well feel like a workhorse (why I continue to draw on domestic analogies I cannot say; perhaps Mr. Corder's garden analogies have pointed me toward the pastoral!).

But of course I am here facing a straw man (there I go again). Twenty Questions for the Writer is not intended to be worked through page by page. It is organized into separate units from which the instructor may select those which best suit the needs of his course: I make this point both in the book and the Instructor's Manual. For example, in using the text last semester I assigned eight of the possible twenty units, along with accompanying exercises and suggested topics in the text from which the student is invited to draw his quota of eight or ten — or dream up some of his own: the abundance demonstrates that the world is so filled with a number of things that one need never go begging for something to write about. Oh yes, I also assigned during the semester the section on "The Long Paper" (research techniques, reference sources, note-taking hints, footnote form, sample term papers, etc.) which took the burden of explaining that somewhat tedious but necessary information entirely off my shoulders. Needless to say "The Style Guide" at the end of the text, which deals with words, sentences, and paragraphs, was used throughout the semester as a reference guide, along with the student's dictionary. This term some of my colleagues at Drew who are using Twenty Questions have made somewhat different selections than mine, similar in scope but with different emphases. Next term maybe I'll try their assignments — just for a change. After all, variety is said to be the spice of life; I think it is also an essential feature of a working text.

Jacqueline Berke
Drew University

To the Editor:

I haven't messed around with gardening as metaphor since my high school graduation speech in the middle of the depression, and, every summer my neighbors give me more vegetables than I ever grow. But I know enough about "corn and okra and all" to spot a false analogy — whether it's in a student's or a professor's writing.

To compare the open approach of from Dialogue to Discourse with a "helter-skelter sort of thing, (where) you guess what each fellow will bring, and you trust the soil to produce without treatment" is to admit you didn't read very far or you didn't read with understanding. To suggest that my kind of open class provides nothing more than "inordinate delight in the helter-skelter garden that lets one enjoy the dirt and stop and look and examine the rocks" is to fail to appreciate the student writing in "Voices from the Open Classroom" (195-256) or the excerpts and whole pieces that show the possibilities I offer for making student voices stronger and clearer (237-346). To say that my "observations, notions, urgings (are) the kind of thing one might often say in class or in conference but seldom commit to print" is to suggest that the sound of a human voice and a touch of human warmth in a textbook is embarrassing. To assert that the book "does not instruct" because it offers modes of learning instead of the usual modes of teaching may be an unconscious confession that the garden of English peas in Jim Corder's mind has a very high fence, even though he's "distrustful of single visions."

I hope nothing in my teaching or my book sounds like "treatment" — for depleted soil or sick people or lawbreakers. But the thorough, perceptive reader will find: (1) systematic movement — from the free and easy writing initially asked for, to the high expectations found in "turning Dialogue into Discourse" (129-164); (2) definite, and I hope clearly defined, relationship — between the invitation to talk on paper and "playing with Stylistic Possibilities" (259-293); between the invitation to talk on paper and "Copyreading" (295-346).

If the human beings called students and the human behaviors called writing were as simple as the life functions of a radish, teaching composition would be as simple as gardening. Buckminster Fuller's concept of self is a more appropriate metaphor for the teaching/learning experiences I hope my book may support and initiate: "I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process — an integral function of the universe."

When condemned for inviting "a student to spend an unholy sum of time upon himself and leave all earth's other marvels waiting," I must first plead guilty to believing that the content of writing is the writer: from D to D asks students to share their ideas with teacher and classmates. It asks teachers to respond to whatever students share. But, in spite of Jim Corder's false impression, 39 of the first 62 pages following the introduction focus not on self but on the community of writers each self is a part of. If helping people communicate their thoughts and feelings to others is social work, then I'm a social worker.

But I also ask that reading become part of the class (89-104); that writers become more aware of the "marvels" all around them (157-170). To help teacher and students understand the purposes and goals of this open approach so they can set up specific expectations for their class, other sections raise crucial issues about language and learning (37-31, 105-127). But nothing in this or any other book has meaning for readers until they make it part of what they already know and feel, until it becomes part of the interior self each person is and is becoming. Only then does anyone have a content. To put into words on a piece of paper. For others to hear and respond to.

It's not easy, of course — strangers, coming to know each other, listening and trying to respond to each other, tentatively comparing
past experiences and present attitudes, fearing the common experience that will test personal knowledge and opinions against the knowledge and opinions of others. But every class where people write needs readers like that. Every student needs someone in addition to teacher to respond to his writing — unless you insist that composition is an academic exercise that has no relationship to the realities of human communication.

"Sooner or later, the teacher who takes [Ms. Kelly's] book in utter seriousness will [not] descend to free-flight bull sessions, however earnest" because she'll stay out of the pea patch long enough to study the text in utter seriousness, and, after accepting the premise that all teachers should hear and respond with human warmth and concern to whatever students say, in class and on paper, she'll find: (1) questions that will help reader and students detect and reject the glib generalizations and slick conclusions they hear, not only in their talking and writing in English 101, but in all their encounters with language and rhetoric; (2) specific suggestions for moving from the free and easy talk, which serves definite purposes during the first few weeks, to thoughtful discussion of the personal values and cultural forces that shape our lives. If that's social work, then helping people analyze what they hear and what they read is social work, and the essayists, poets, dramatists, and novelists we want our students to read are social workers.

If I could think of people as furrows in Jim Corder's garden, lying moist and warm in the Texas sun, waiting to be sown with seeds of Truth, Rhetoric and Grammatical Beauty, maybe I would willingly admit to "guessing what each furrow will bring." I certainly don't spend long winter evenings dreaming through seed catalogues, choosing what I'm going to plant in the minds lying still and empty inside the bodies that fill the chairs in my spring class. Only after they tell me their interests and concerns, do I give them books and articles to read, cite other sources, or help them find and use the library.

The week of January 16 is not the time Iowans must have ground broken in the garden; it's [not] time to plant English peas. These Good Daddy Yankee Plains are frozen hard as a rock, or they're muddy as a swamp, long past ground hog day. I wonder, when does the gardening season begin in southern California? And how do your English peas grow in the hot, dry deserts of Nevada?

The teacher who feels "inclined to poke" by a text that speaks with "urgency and the need to be close to the students," the teacher who thinks asking students to sit together in friendly little groups is "so cute (he) bug(s) up," may need to get close enough to see that the human beings he wants to fill with his English peas are at least as different as the climate that different gardeners must reckon with. And for his students' sake, I hope his caustic reaction to mixing a little joy with school work passes — as most belittles do. But it probably won't. Not if he shares the schoolteacher conviction that learning is always work, that play is never learning. We're supposed to come on scholarly and distant, while students passively accept or reject, and write, not to be heard, but to be graded. Composition class is not the place for the joy that comes when our words reach out and touch another human being.

(from Dialogue to Discourse) will be of no use to the teacher who cannot read student writing as a dialogue with the writer. For the first month students bring in half a page or 2 or 3 pages almost every class day — responding to a single page or a short section of the text, or saying on paper what they were too shy or didn't think of saying during a class discussion, or initiating a new subject for discussion by sharing a personal concern. The teacher listening and looking for the facts we need for her, each person become a better writer learns whose writing is incoherent, superficial, fuzzy or general; leaves whose writing is not fluent or forceful because it's weighted down with deadwood or with sentence structures that obscure the relationships essential to meaning; leaves who is not a competent copresider. So instruction begins with the particular needs and the particular interests of each writer. And if we've earned their trust during the first 3 or 4 weeks by responding to what they say instead of correcting errors and judging ideas, if we've demonstrated our respect for their ideas by letting class discussion evolve from their writing, the joy in self and others that comes with the easy talking — in class and on paper — will not turn into frustration and boredom when we start asking the questions that will help them convey their ideas more clearly and more forcefully to classmates or other readers. Obviously, a lot of men need to be liberated from a lot of stuffy, elitist misconceptions. Like Jim Corder's implication that somewhere on somebody's desk or in somebody's head there's a book "sufficient" unto the needs of all students and all teachers. From D to D says all books are insufficient: "We must reject all the software and hardware that offer new or old ways of proving grammar or rhetoric or great ideas into the student's head. We must permit, we must help all students bring the reality of their own lives, their own language, into the classroom. No book can tell us how to do it. Nobody can answer all our questions about the open class. With the human resources our students bring with them, with the human situations that develop within the group, we make whatever we can. For teaching is a creative act." L. Kelly

University of Iowa

Book Reviews


We all know how you're supposed to write. First you have an idea, something to write about. Think before you write. Then you organize your idea, with a Beginning Middle & End. After that you put it all down in outline form, maybe with Roman numerals. Then you begin writing.

That's the way it's supposed to be, more or less, according to the conventional handbooks, and I suppose there never was a real writer who ever believed it. It's not, of course, and never has been, for most people, the way to go about it. The way to go about it is to start writing.

The first half of Peter Elbow's new book makes that point — a little endlessly, for my taste, but the point is certainly made. Get going. Put something down. Don't look back, don't edit. Babbie away.

Given the upright conditions still surrounding most teaching of composition, even in these swinging times, Elbow's message is no doubt needed and welcome. He isn't the only one to have proffered it in recent years, of course, but he has some fresh contributions to make, and the message is welcome anyway. In Writing Without Teachers, Elbow is deliberately addressing ordinary people who are scared of words, especially written words. And he is addressing particularly, he says, "young people and adults not in school," for whom he has his original program to propose. But first, the initial liberating self-exercise — freewriting.

"Yes, it produces garbage, but that's all right... If you do freewriting regularly, much or most of it will be inferior to what you can produce through care and rewriting. But the good bits will be much better than anything else you can produce by any other method." The question a student might reasonably ask here — How do I tell the good bits from the garbage? — Elbow doesn't pretend to answer. It's fair to say he isn't really interested in Good Writing, whatever that may be — and he says nobody knows. He's interested instead in something more important: health, perhaps, or self-discovery, or growth in confidence. It's significant that there are hardly any quotations in this book illustrating what anybody would describe as Good Writing. (What quotations there are, all too often, are from Elbow's own journals, anxiously complaining about how hard it is to write well. The effect is oddly turned-in; the outside world of things and people goes unattended. Elbow's fondness for the expressions "X, Y, Z" as substitutes for concrete examples has a like effect.)

The two metaphors Elbow then takes up to continue his discussion, writing as growing
and writing as cooking, are not much concerned with telling the good bits from the garbage. "Sometimes it often feels as if these words were 'going somewhere' such that when they 'got there' best, it was because I succeeded in getting out of their way. . . . I advise you to treat words as though they are potentially able to grow." This is pretty mysterious, as you see. (But then, it is mysterious.) As for cooking, we begin to feel a glimmer of something on the way to being specific. Cooking is a mixing of contrasting, oil and vinegar. "I think I've finally figured out. Cooking is the interaction of contrasting or conflicting material." Paucity of examples, however.

Well, never mind. Let me not pound Peter Elbow for failing to do what he's not about to do. What he is about to do is propose a procedure for helping ordinary people improve their writing (and/or themselves). This procedure he calls "the teacherless writing class." It is patterned explicitly on the psychiatrist's encounter group. Seven to twelve people are to meet together, at least weekly, and read to one another what they've written. There is no teacher there, or if one has sneaked in, he keeps his mouth shut. People listen to one another reacting to writing, and the reactions are from the heart. No reaction is wrong. "If someone reports something that seems crazy, listen to him openly. Try to have his experience. . . . Your position may blind you to what he sees. Your only chance of trying to sharpen your eyesight is to take seriously his seeming craziness and try to see what he sees. This may similarly encourage him to try to share what you see and thereby help make him a better reader too."

I'm cooking now, feeling the contraries interact, or anyway conflict. For on the one hand, Elbow and I see eye to eye. In the teacherless class, students are required to respond honestly to a speaking voice, which is just where I try to begin too. How do you feel about this character addressing you? (Not the author, of course.) What sort of character is he?

But on the other hand, then there's the next question — and maybe I ask it too soon. The next question is, How did the voice get that way? What is it, in the language, you're responding to? As I ask that question (again and again), I'm sure Elbow would find me too systematic (for all my dishelvement), perhaps even authoritarian and pedantic as I drop words like persons and passive voice. Well, so be it. Actually I think the teacherless class is a fine idea and everybody should join one, including me. But after we've done that for a while, and we're good at freewriting and have developed some confidence, reacted a lot — then let's get together and talk hard about words and contexts.

Elbow's book is of course part of a bouncy and refreshing movement going on in our profession, to get us all to loosen up and fly right. This movement is certain to have a healthy influence on everybody's teaching. I think particularly of the writings of Ken Macrorie, of an excellent new book on the open-classroom by Lou Kelly called From Dialogue to Discourse (Scott, Foreman), and of the work of open-admissions students at City College in New York by Mina Shaughnessy and her colleagues. There are dozens of others, of course. People are more important than writing, is what these teachers are all telling us, and they're right. But it's ok to be interested in good writing too, and in ways of telling it from garbage. And for that, I don't know any substitute for hard work under the guidance of somebody who knows better. Maybe nobody disagrees.

Elbow has added an "appendix essay" called "The Doubting Game and the Believing Game — An Analysis of the Intellectual Enterprise." New audience, slightly less unbuttoned style. There are many fine things in it. "Perception is more like making a drawing than taking a photograph." If people understood just that one piece of wisdom, the world would never be the same. Predictably, in the dialectic between doubting and believing, Elbow plumbs for believing: "The believing game is built on the idea that the self cannot be removed: complete objectivity is impossible. . . . Instead of trying to minimize the drawing and estimating models of perception and thinking, the believing game tries to exploit them: you are constantly being asked to make the other person's drawing, make the other person's estimate." This endeavor to reach out to another's point of view, so much a part of the teacherless class, is an essential drive in Elbow's whole view of the mind. Put it this way: the strain between trying to be someone else, and the impossibly of ever succeeding, is what we call communication.

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Avoiding gimmicks and jargon, content with the old-fashioned way to be new, Donald Hall has shaped in Writing Well a most usable and original composition text. His book is usable because it abounds with thoughtful writing assignments, with examples of good prose, and with practical advice about writing clearly, simply, and honestly. It is original because Hall creates the voice of a writer who has mastered his craft and who conveys his love of language with wit and wisdom. Writing Well deserves shelf space beside the briefest and now classic Strunk and White.

tensive Glossary and provides a helpful Index.

So far, rather ordinary.

But Hall is a craftsman. He divides his book into sections, but he refuses to chop up the act of writing. When he discusses words, he shows us paragraphs and sentences to remind us that "context is all"; when he talks of paragraphs, he nudges us with news about words and sentences. He comments on cliches, getting ideas, figurative language, and many other matters in almost every section, adding to our understanding of good writing as he goes. Whatever the focus of a section, Hall insists that effective writing has wholeness. As a result, he does not lock teachers into his organization, but allows them to begin where they will — with papers, paragraphs, or sentences, rather than words.

Most teachers will want to begin with the "Introduction," a 24-page essay which shows and tells about writing well. For Hall, writing is self-discovery, not self-indulgence:

A good writer uses words to discover, and to bring that discovery to other people. He writes so that his prose is a pleasure that carries knowledge with it. That pleasure-carrying knowledge comes from self-understanding, and becomes the understanding of others. It makes the difference between writing and writing well.

This discovery requires honest self-examination that may be "uncomfortable, but in the end more satisfying than self-delusion"; it means stripping away cliches and undefined abstractions so that one's words discover the pleasure-carrying knowledge. Hall also distinguishes clearly between the sincerity of a writer's intention and the sincerity of the words that create his voice, a distinction many beginning writers ignore.

Honesty, clarity, simplicity, sincerity these demand discipline. Here's Hall telling us how people learn to write:

So how do we learn to write well? We can do three things, at least. First, we can read well, which helps slowly, but keeps on helping; second, we can study writing and think about it and discuss it with others; third, and most important, we can write, and rewrite, and rewrite.

Because rewriting our own work is most helpful, we must have writing to rewrite.

Writing, rewriting, and more rewriting — that is Hall's persistent theme, the one at the center of his book and his theory of composition.

Hall dramatizes his theme by printing student papers by Jim Beck and Marian Han, their first versions and their rewritings. An impromptu paper about "How I Came to College," Beck's first version begins with "Education is of paramount importance to today's youth" and ends with "a well-rounded person." Very familiar. When Beck rewrote his paper later in the term, he threw away everything in the impromptu but a sentence beginning, "Coming here has been a disappoint-
ment so far." From that, Jim Beck shaped an eight-paragraph paper talking about his own experience, in his own language and voice. Jim Beck's rewriting is good (almost eloquent) because he does exactly what Hall has been telling us to do to write well.

One of the strengths of Hall's book is that he nearly always finds the apt example, the telling detail, the illuminating metaphor to dramatize what he means by writing well.

In "Words," Hall says that a writer must be able "to feel words intimately, one at a time," and "to step back, inside his head, and see the flowing sentence." To do this, a writer must "know not just surface definitions," but "families of contexts with which particular words have been associated." Hall calls this awareness knowing "the inside of a word." "Words" is about getting to know those insides and making words flow in sentences.

It is also about contexts and appropriateness, what Jonathan Swift called putting proper words in proper places. Hall agrees:

"Context is all; the inside of a word must reinforce or continue the force of the context. When a sportswriter wrote that another middle linebacker aped Dick Butkus, he was being witty. (p. 28)

Though the general advice — to choose color over pallor, energy over lethargy — holds true, one matter overrides all others, in any discussion of style, the matter of appropriateness: context is all. (p. 46)

The student who writes that stem "vomited" from the train is using that word "for the sake of its power, and not for what it contributes to the picture." When sports announcer Howard Cosell said that a new quarterback "walked in the wake of a great predecessor," Hall believes the language approaches blasphemy. Neither Cosell nor the student was paying attention to context and appropriateness.

Hall's old-fashioned newness shows again when he discusses practical ways to achieve vigor, specificity, concreteness, and liveliness in diction. He talks at length about verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and other modifiers, providing lively examples of effective and defective word choices. Then in his "Exercises," he poses specific problems requiring students to practice the skills he has been describing — and practicing himself. Students working through these sections will know what Hall means by "the inside of a word."

Throughout "Words," Hall reminds us to write and rewrite: "Originality combines opposites: we dream with our eyes open; we are inspired — then we scrutinize and revise. Scrutiny provides the motive to revise." And that the words we choose make much difference: "Yet once more, the choice of a style means something. A change of style, however slight, is a change of meaning, however slight:" (Hall's italics)

Seeing "no virtue in inventing new terms," Hall uses the old labels — simple, compound, complex — to describe "Sentences." In this section, he discusses such problems as unity, variety, parallelism, emphasis, rhythm; he also shows what happens when modifiers dangle or are misplaced, because these errors affect meaning. To dramatize the differences between formal and informal prose and between effective and pompous writing. Hall pairs good writing with parodies of it. When "I returned and saw under the sun" becomes "Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that" (Hall is quoting Orwell), the differences should be obvious. If the student sees the distance between good prose and its parody, Hall believes he will understand what is right and wrong with diction and sentence structure. Hall's examples and exercises are convincing.

"Paragraphs" does the expected. It treats unity, coherence, topic sentences, methods of development, transitions — matters one would find in any writing text. Then Hall devotes thirteen pages to exercises that make students write and revise until they begin to understand the inside of the paragraph.

"The Paper" opens with comments about getting ideas, finding an order for presenting ideas, and about beginnings, middles, and conclusions. In this section, Hall writes a series of essays about different kinds of papers — from exposition and argument to research papers and papers about literature. These sub-sections are admirable for their conciseness and clarity. Hall ends his discussion of writing well as he began it — with student writing, a research paper by Jennifer Case about the humpback whale and some short essays about literature. Again, there are many exercises.

The thoughtful "Exercises" throughout Writing Well carry the student from commentary and example to the concreteness of practice. Hall's insistence on practice becomes the refrain of these "Exercises"; it goes like this: Invent, Write, Imitate, Revise, Collect, Rewrite, Edit, Rearrange, Analyze. Not necessarily in that order.

Hall does not fool himself about what his book can and cannot do. "This book," he says, "like the course that uses it, tries to take short-cuts" to learning to write well. True. But not that short. The student paying attention to Hall will write better, much better.

Besides Writing Well, Donald Hall has written several books of prose and five volumes of poetry. In The Dark House, Donald Hall the poet says:

So the poet, the talker, aims his words at the object, and his words go faster and faster, and now he is like a cyclotron, breaking into the structure of things by repeated speed and force in order to lay bare in words, naturally, unwooded insides of things, the things that are there.

Yes, the poet does this. But so does the "writer writing well," the man who discovers pleasure-carrying knowledge through prose.

That's what Writing Well is all about.

Robert Bain
University of North Carolina

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