GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT?: FRESHMAN ENGLISH IN THE 1970'S

by Joseph J. Compone
University of Cincinnati

A few days ago I overheard a colleague as he expounded on Freshman English, both as he had taught it in the late sixties and as he teaches it now.

"They," he said, "were trying to convince our students that we could teach with moral purpose, that we could talk about politics and social problems and simultaneously learn to write. We were more worried in the late sixties about the seeming combination of wordiness and social idealism in our students. And we sometimes forgot about teaching skills, probably because we expected students to have those skills and, even when we didn't have much evidence that they did actually possess them, we put more emphasis on developing commitment and motivation, on getting our students to want to write. Now we seem to have said good-bye to all that and decided to return, sometimes with a vengeance, to skill-teaching.

And our students—quieter, more cynical, a bit more tractable, even a bit jaded—seem to encourage us in our re-emphasis of skills. They almost want to learn to write."

Like most teachers who took graduate degrees in the mid or late sixties, my colleague seemed terribly jaded, even a bit bored, as he spoke. Gone was the spirited debate over what relevant really meant—in relation to Shakespeare, Tom Wolfe or Tim Leary—that filled academic coffee rooms in the late sixties. Gone were the heated debates over whether your students should write narrative-descriptions of a recent sit-in or a comparison of "Pride and Prejudice" and "To His Coy Mistress." Certainly the sometimes exasperating, sometimes devastating, sometimes exhilarating controversy of the late sixties has been replaced by a "let us set our house in order" atmosphere. To some, the late sixties had been a time to "set our house on fire." And some publishers seem to have grasped the shift from the "romantic agony" of the sixties to the "rage for order" in the early seventies more quickly and perhaps with broader insight than many teachers.

Too many of us, however, oversimplify such cycles and tendencies. For every current mode of thought remains some of what it intends to replace. And the "rage for order" we are currently experiencing in Freshman English must, if it is to result in intellectually viable and practical writing programs, combine some of the positive effects of the late sixties experiments with some of the more structured and systematic approaches of the seventies. And the combination must bring the positives together, interrelate and put them into complementing juxta-positions.

II

What is happening to the "relevant" approaches of the late sixties—the readers geared to social problems, the sometimes vogueish attention to language games and the media, the emphases on the "psychology" of writing? These influences haven't ceased to be relevant; they have merely ceased to be voguishly relevant. And they are treated with more attention to what they can tell us about writing, about form as it interworks with content, than they were in the "relevant" late sixties, when the teacher's primary aim in using such materials was often to convince his students that writing was worth it, that writing could mean an ongoing dialogue with the real world and not just a meaningless mechanical mode of transferring known information to paper. In a sense, the relevant subject matters were the teacher's ways of telling students what they thought and felt counted. Just to convince a student that writing was valuable, that it could be used to change deep-set values, to discover, what was inside the writer as well as to imitate the external, the "given" world—that in itself was enough. The student, once he was motivated, would do the rest. Or so we thought.

But we seem to have discovered in the seventies that motivation is merely a beginning. Certainly we cannot assume motivation; we do need to make our courses interesting and useful. Jonathan Edwards' fire and brimstone sermons during the "Great Awakening" in eighteenth-century Enfield, Connecticut, may have "saved" many lost souls, but the church itself existed in the background to take in those who had been emotionally saved. And the church structure gave the "saved" individual what he or she could get from the conversion experience itself; a form and order that he could use to control and direct his everyday actions.

And, very often, that is where our writing courses failed in the late sixties. We created, in the best of those courses, the desire to discover and express through language. But we often did little to improve the students' actual writing. The "turn-on" often wasn't followed with a purposeful skill program. And we sometimes confused our students by emphasizing writing as fun or self-discovery while de-emphasizing the obvious fact that effective writing almost always has purpose, discipline and form—whether the writer is E. L. Doctorow or Bill Buckley. The "fun" of writing is more like the fun of climbing a difficult mountain or winning a match point against a talented tennis opponent than it is like the fun of eating a steak.

But many of the qualitative innovations of the sixties were, or might be, easily structured and ordered. They can turn-on and then be used to teach follow-up skills; they can be incorporated into programs that teach discovery and specific writing skills.

Let me turn to what I believe were three of the most useful and exciting contributions of the late sixties. How might they be absorbed into the more formal structures, the more disciplined course frameworks, of the early seventies? And, when and if they are absorbed, how can they be made to work naturally together, both to help students understand why they write and to teach them something about how to write?

1. Using Student Experience: During the late sixties, college writing teachers seemed to discover that their students actually were alive, that they had lived for some nineteen or twenty years, that they had used language almost the entire time, that they had experiences of their own about which they might write. I certainly hope that we don't lose this fact now that the "rage for order" is upon us. Our students, however much evidence we occasionally receive to the contrary, are alive and their language and experience can be incorporated in a way that encourages disciplined learning of skills as well as in a way that gives the student a sense of pride in his native talents, in the way he uses words in his everyday life.

We can devise structured writing exercises that have students write from immediate observations of experience. We can teach inductive and deductive patterns of organization by having students analyze and write about paintings, cartoons, people. We can generally give attention to the learning of skills—organization, unity, coherence, development—while we also recognize that those skills can be applied to subject matters with which our students are familiar. We must recognize our students' experience and move more naturally to the rhetorical means of forming and expressing that experience. Don't just say, as many did in the late sixties, "Experience and write." Rather say, "You have experience and I will try to show you how to get into writing." Ken Macrorie's "Telling Writing" ought to have convinced us that an experimental approach to writing can become the base for a very structured and disciplined writing program.

2. Developing a Student's Voice: We also need to continue learning more about how a student's everyday use of language can be in-
the film's photographer-protagonist? Both questions, treated practically, might make useful compositional analogies for apprentice writers.

III

Only when such questions are at least tentatively answered will our writing courses effectively incorporate the innovations of the late sixties into structured, sensible skill-oriented general programs. And we need texts that will give teachers as well as students a frame of reference for such qualitative amalgamations of subject and structure. Richard Weina of Scott, Foresman made these remarks in a recent issue of this newsletter. He was speaking of Freshman English textbooks, as he envisioned them, over the rest of this decade.

So now it seems to me that we're in for a period of new-tradition-alism in Freshman English, and books of traditional form—handbooks, rhetorics, standard readers—seem to be making something of a comeback... mainly I think the return to traditional texts stems from a desire to get back to basic principles of composition and literature... No, a return to structure does not always mean a return to convention. For structures must grow out of a context; we need to define and pull together that context. Just what kinds of program structures are suggested by the various means we now use to teach writing? Even though the forms of books we publish in the future may be conventional, the content may not. The changes and innovations of recent years have not been entirely forgotten... The whole concept of the writing process is altering; writing is not only a communication skill but also a means to self-awareness. So I don't think that a return to more conventional modes of instruction necessarily signals a return to conventional modes of thought.

In other words, the innovations of the late sixties are ready now to be solidified into disciplined, purposeful overall programs. We don't need, nor can we really afford, to use "innovations" such as experimental writing, self-discovery and choice, the media and other experimental approaches merely because they are "new," "relevant" or because they can "turn-on" our students. They either can or they can't teach writing. And by now we ought to be able to separate the gimmick from the actually useful approach. That means, as Richard Weina suggests, a quality combination of some "new" content with some very old, and some very new as well, rhetorical structures. Too many of our writing courses have separated what was written-about from the writing process itself.

We aren't, I suggest, saying good-by to anything by emphasizing structure and purpose. Some of the most useful structures that appear may be very different from anything we've seen before. And many of the new perspectives and techniques will find their way into these structures. I merely want to help my students to discover both something to say and an effective way to say it. Simultaneously.

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The horse dealer who inspects the teeth of the animal he is about to purchase uses a sound brand of reasoning: If the teeth are old, he concludes that the rest of the horse is old too. I have employed a similar tactic in reviewing eight of the currently available freshman handbooks, inspecting the section devoted to paragraphing and concluding, with horse dealer's logic, that a recitation there of the old bromides augurs more of the same in other sections, while the appearance of new information based on recent scholarship may be a sound indicator of updated methods throughout.

The following tables contain the results of my equine analysis for the eight texts listed here.

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While table one is, I think, self-explanatory, table two may require some comment. The innovations that appear in the left-hand column derive from the much heralded Symposium on the Paragraph conducted by CCC in 1966 (17:60-87). A capsule summary of each contribution follows.

Paul C. Rodgers, Jr. (CCC, 17:2-14 and 18:178-185) argues that the notion of the paragraph as a unit of discourse to develop a single idea is inconsistent with actual practice. Rather, ideas are developed in paragraph blocs, termed stadia of discourse. Rodgers describes methods for locating and analyzing these stadia, proposing strategies for indentation, or paragraph punctuation, within these blocs.

Alton Becker (CCC, 16:237-242) substitutes functional slots for the conventional patterns of paragraph development. A typical paragraph might consist of three slots (T-R-S): a topic, a restriction of that topic, and support for the restricted topic. He also argues that there are formal cues of semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological nature that define the paragraphs within a discourse, specifying where indentations should occur.

Francis Christensen (CCC, 16:144-156) states that the most characteristic practice of professional writers is to generate paragraphs from the top downward, employing the addition of concrete information of details to support a general topic or "top" sentence. Direction of movement deals with the function of a sentence within a paragraph, whether it supports a preceding sentence (points backward) or introduces new information requiring further support (points forward). Levels of generality define the shape of the paragraph—as a coordinate or parallel sequence of sentences, each supporting a topic directly; as a subordinate sequence, each sentence amplifying the one preceding it; or as a mixed sequence, containing both coordinate and subordinate sequences. Finally, texture refers to the amount and variety of support given to a particular topic.

Richard Larson (CCC, 17:16-22) sketches a synthesis of Christensen's method and the conventional modes of discourse. He points out that the shifts from one level of generality to another are governed by the modes of discourse—that is, a writer may shift to a lower level of generality for any of several reasons: to show cause, to cite examples or details, to compare or contrast, etc. Thus the conventional "combination of methods" is shown to be more often the rule in paragraph development than the development by a single method so often cited in handbook examples. Following his method, students may profit from mapping exercises in which they discover the differing levels of generality in paragraphs, along with the reasons or strategies that occasioned them.

The results of my analysis are clear to see. Of the best sellers of long standing, G-L is the only one making an attempt to stay abreast of the times; the remainder continue to tread the pathways of antiquity. Of the newcomers, Corbett offers nothing new, while Irmscher and J-J have included a substantial amount of new material, although still paying tribute to traditional techniques.

A glance at other sections of G-L, Irmscher, and J-J bears out the horse dealer's logic even further. There the instructor will find sentence rhetoric flavored by Christensen, transformational analyses of syntax, Rogerian argumentation, and other fairly recent innovations—innovations predictably absent in the other texts dealt with here.

Although the results are quite apparent—that three of the eight texts examined contain new and vital information for composition teachers and their students—it is not altogether clear that these texts will enjoy a prosperous future. It is not clear that the majority of composition teachers want innovations. Rather, it is increasingly clear that the tendency is to eschew methods that do not fit neatly into the musty lesson plans prepared during graduate school and taught unaltered to succeeding generations of freshmen.

My conclusion must, therefore, go beyond the mere observation that only three of the widely touted handbooks offer something new. I must suggest strongly that the director of freshman English who wishes to have an innovative text adopted do more than submit the competing texts for the inspection and vote of his colleagues. He must become a horse dealer of the highest order, mounting promotional campaigns replete with appeals to educational zealotry, freedom of expression, motherhood, and apple pie—or else resort to methods of coercion or Flen Snopes chicanery. Anything less will most surely spell another year with Hodges and the Herbrace Handbook, a predicament into which, I must confess, my own lassitude has led me.

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"WHEN I WAS ONE-AND-TWENTY"

F. Richard Friedman
Central Oregon Community College

A frequent complaint of composition teachers concerns the poor preparation of entering freshmen. The "standard, college-level composition course" (if it exists) focuses on the composition of expository essays. It assumes (i.e., the teacher hopes) the students can write grammatically complete sentences and paragraphs relatively free from major grammatical errors. The course stresses formal English usage, sentence structure, paragraph development, rhetorical strategies, and organizational skills. (It further assumes that students can read and comprehend scholarly and professional-level prose.) Because that set of expectations for high school graduates has often been too high, many community, junior, and 4-year colleges have set up remedial courses and clinics to help students with problems of spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and usage.

Some instructors have stopped teaching writing skills and have turned Freshman English into a study of anything — pop culture, radical chic, politics, mass media, social issues, or what have you — in an attempt at "relevance." Some institutions have dropped all composition requirements, and many have reduced them. Yet there are still those students who need to learn how to think more clearly, speak more fluently, read more efficiently, and write more effectively. While we may cavil over what the high schools are or are not doing, and while we aren't accountable for the skills our students bring with them (How's your high school articulation doing lately?), we are responsible for trying to meet the needs of those students who still want, or are required, to learn how to improve their writing.

In response, many composition teachers have moved away from assigning formal expository essays in which students choose subjects based on the reading selections in their texts (traditional thematic or rhetorical readers). Rather, these teachers are assigning essays in which students, using a less formal level of diction, draw upon their own experience and observations for source material. (Having students keep daily journals is frequently a useful way for students to explore their experience and to generate raw material for their essays.)

This shift can help solve many of the perennial problems of teaching composition. One of the most frustrating aspects of our work is the insincerity of much student writing.

We have tried to be "relevant" by discussing "relevant" subjects, having students read about them and write about them. What we all-too-often get are essays which merely reiterate what we and the text have said, in "English," to borrow Ken Macrorie's term. The writing is vapid: because the student writers are parroting something they have heard or read. They are not composing essays, selecting the ideas they will use and developing them with information they have gathered. Their experience, their knowledge, and their beliefs are not a part of what they have written. In their attempts to write like expert psychologists, sociologists, or critics, they usually fail because their knowledge and experience usually are not adequate to the task. Yet they know that we expect them to achieve a level of writing proficiency approaching that of the examples in their textbooks.

When we assign essays with subjects based on what students have read and discussed in class, what we tend to suggest to them is that they have nothing worth saying on their own, that their ideas must come from other sources, and that they are qualified to discuss only the subjects we assign. And asking them to give "their opinion" about what we and the text have said doesn't change the implication. When students have been assigned such subjects by their English teachers year after year, they have learned that their teachers believe students have nothing of their own to contribute. Those teachers, students feel, are only concerned with hearing their own opinions parroted — and with counting errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. English teachers who display this lack of faith and simultaneously use professional writing as models for student emulation make their students feel they are being asked to do the impossible.

When students are given a chance to choose their own subjects, and are encouraged to value, critically examine, and utilize their own experiences and observations, they are more likely to write with sincerity and accuracy. And as we teach them to recognize the limits of their experience and to qualify their statements of opinion, we are helping them to think critically and clearly. And when we teach them how to validate and supplement their own knowledge and experience with the observations and information that other sources can provide, we are teaching them some important research skills.

Under these conditions, my students write fewer boring papers and are less prone to blame boring subjects imposed upon them. Instead my students more frequently write papers which are genuinely informative and persuasive because real human experience and conviction underlie what they write. Instead of assigning subjects, I structure the students' use of language with assignments like these: "Use two distinct levels of diction in two samples discussing the same subject," or "Write a paper defining the meanings and uses of any term or concept of your choice."

When students base their writings on personal experience and observation, they can use what I call "high informal" English, which has most of the same grammatical standards as does formal English, but which is less abstract and which can be personal rather than impersonal. This level of usage, while still calling for considerable discipline if its use is to be effective, enables students to avoid the passive constructions and "pretzel prose" so typical of writers just learning to imitate formal, scholarly language. Because "high informal" English is a little closer to conversational patterns of speech, students writing it can draw upon some of their conversational skills in composing sentences which are smooth, direct, and clear. In short, this type of writing provides a starting point for college freshmen which is realistic, and yet which still requires the writing skills a freshman composition course should teach.

I find that the greatest value of this approach has to do with self-image. Students need to learn that their knowledge and experience are limited, that their observations may be biased in any of the dozens of ways, that they aren't experts on everything they hear or read in the news. Yet they can also learn that they are experts on their own experiences and values, that other people can have a genuine interest in their observations, and that their ideas and opinions are worth writing about if they will work to make their statements accurate, appropriate, and articulate. Then, writing becomes self-discovery as well as communication with others, it becomes something others want to read, and it becomes worth the effort. That is a satisfaction our students deserve to experience.

PRELIMINARIES TO COMPOSITION

William P. Bivens, III
California State University (Humboldt)

When composition teachers ignore any body of knowledge which could help them and their students, they work under a self-imposed handicap. It is surprising therefore that so few avail themselves of basic linguistic principles when deciding what they will teach and what methods will be effective. This crippling failure was evident in the remarks by many of the participants in seminars which dealt with problems of freshman composition at the Modern Language Association meeting in New York, last December. The discouraging lack of precision with which these teachers of clear expression handled the concepts of language embodied in such terms as usage, social dialects, syntax, and correctness showed plainly that the linguistic community had failed either to make its findings generally available or to show how they should be applied. Where these findings have been made available, as in the NDEA Institutes of the latter half of the 1960's, English departments have often failed to take advantage of them as a means of equipping their graduates for the demands of composition courses. Assigning blame in these matters would be difficult and probably useless. Instead, I offer a few basic linguistic concepts as a basis for discussion of their tentative applications. The aims of this piece are modest—linguists have frequently promised too much, raising expectations they could not fulfill.
First, we must separate usage from grammar, for the former has often been taught under the name of the latter. When a teacher marks a student's use of *like* as an improper conjunction, or insists upon the use of *shall* with first person subjects and the use of singular pronouns with antecedents such as *everybody* (e.g., *everybody did his homework*), these are matters of usage. Contrary to popular opinion, no theoretical basis exists to select correct expression. Many pronouncements in this area reflect social prejudice rather than linguistic fact and date only from the eighteenth-century when the first manuals appeared to tell the curious which forms were "correct." (Albert C. Baugh gives a readable account of this prescriptive movement in Chapter 9, *A History of the English Language.*) The appearance of these manuals coincides with the rise of the middle class, and one is tempted to speculate that prescriptive correctness has always been perceived as a means of social mobility. The first widely accepted statement of correct usage was Bishop Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) and the tone of his pronouncements about correct language hints of his habitual associations with the absolutes of divine law. In Lowth's *Grammar* we find the first full set of prescriptions for the use of *shall* and *will* (prior to 1622, there was no distinction recognized between the two words), as well as numerous other arbitrary pronouncements, some of which have since become customary usage. Lowth's methods for determining correct forms included logic and reason ("Two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative," as quoted in Baugh, p. 336), and etymology. The latter method still persists in modern pronouncements about *between* which remind the curious that the word originally means only two and thus sentences such as *The money was divided between the three children* are not suitable for "formal" writing. The prescription has been relaxed in most recent statements, but the etymological information still persists to confuse or disturb.

Handbooks of "college grammar" and many modern dictionaries (including the *American Heritage Dictionary* published in 1969) are the present-day manuals of usage. Not only do these books perpetrate the confusion between grammar and usage, but they also prescribe common usages in favor of others which are "more formal." In the case of *like*, for example, many popular manuals approve of sentences such as *He looks like his father where like is a preposition, but not of sentences such as *It looks like it might rain, He felt like he should go*, and others which are commonly used but in which *like* functions as a conjunction (here *as if* is prescribed). A number of rules govern the use of *shall*, most of them artificial and never used in either speech or writing. Speech styles vary from writing styles, but not primarily in the areas of usage for which these manuals offer rules. These prescriptions would teach the student to write an artificial dialect, different from the one he and his peers, as well as his instructors, speak. Such pronouncements are hopelessly inconsistent, however, and result only in confusion. For example, the prescriptions regarding *like* mentioned above frequently approve a third use of the word in which it marks a simile: *He is attracted to blondes like a moth to light* (*Harbrace Handbook*, 1972:218). Here *like* conjoins the first clause to the reduced second clause: *a moth is attracted to lights.* The manuals maintain truculent silence on the inevitable question of why this use of *like* as a conjunction is acceptable while others are not. Many other examples could be found—one more will suffice. *Should* and *would* are the past tense of *shall* and *will*. If first person subjects require *shall*, they should also require *should*. I find no statement to that effect in the popular manuals. The sentences accompanying the prescriptions as illustrations do not clarify—their intent is rather to present obscure problems of pronoun usage, verb agreement, and other issues. Thus deprived of good models on the one hand and told to write "more formally" on the other, students produce awkward, wordy sentences in a boorish dialect characterized by passives, intensifiers, limp verbs, and expletive constructions. Moreover, stern condemnations of normal language practices and the inability of the student to measure up to the prescribed standard often result in a sense of inferiority, especially among minorities. These groups have been taught to view language as a key to social mobility. Subconsciously at least, they come to expect the predominantly white, middle-class schools to teach them a standard dialect. The difficulties white students have with instruction based on usage is even more pronounced for minorities, and may explain much of their disgust with schools in general. (A polemical discussion of social dialects and English instruction for minority groups may be found in James Sled, "Bi-Dialectalism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy," *English Journal*, 58:1307-1315.)

The point of my criticism is that matters of usage generally have little to do with the precision and clarity we desire in good writing. The pronouncements generate an unseasiness which inhibits students from getting words on paper and results in the phenomenon we have all observed of the student who is perfectly articulate in speech but unable to write a coherent sentence. The constant insistence on "formal" usage leads the student to believe that good writing is marked by a grand style consisting of "very learned words" (*Harbrace Handbook*, 1972:197) and "correct" usage. The control of style is very difficult, and attempts at elevated style by the inexperienced generally lead to flatulence. While experienced writers choose from acceptable usages those appropriate to the desired effect, the judgement necessary for this choice can come only with years of practice. The composition teacher must consider carefully whether the time he spends teaching undergraduates to determine the relative effects of stylistic choice merits the results he can hope to obtain. I suspect they do not and recommend that he abandon attempts to teach "formal" style, and concentrate on clarity of expression as his primary goal. This is not to say, "anything goes"—speech differs from writing, but not because the latter is "more formal" in the sense that most students understand the term.

One way in which students achieve clarity of expression is by combining what transformational grammarians call *kernel sentences* into complex syntactic units. *NCTE Research Reports*, Numbers 1-13, on the language of school children show that skill at combining sentences into syntactic complexes can be taught and that it improves "syntactic fluency." As students mature in their writing, for example, sentences which elaborate and clarify their main ideas move from expression in separate sentences, to contained clauses, and finally to reduce forms such as gerunds, participles, and infinitives. (John C. Mellon, *Report* 10, p. 81). As students approach writing maturity, they use these processes of combination and reduction to communicate economically and to give pleasing variety to their sentences. By grammatically subordinating some ideas to others, they indicate the relative importance of their ideas to the reader. This ranking and economy, skilfully applied, gives clarity and precision to student composition, and the processes by which it is achieved should be the focus of grammar instruction. Such a focus should improve the atmosphere in the composition class, because it teaches students what they can do to improve their writing. Too often grades on compositions stem from mysterious standards which reflect an all or nothing degree of attainment. Students must know when they approach the desired norm and be taught to improve their work by putting more thought into each sentence through combination and reduction of kernel sentences, and by indicating their relative importance through control of subordination. Robert Zoeller's work on behavioral composition elaborates the need for indicating increments of achievement to students. I do not agree with the methods he advocates, but his criticism of the present system merits careful, unintentional attention: "A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition." (*College English*, 30:327-328.)

The approach I am advocating is not a panacea. In part, good writing comes only through practice—it is a skill which can be learned but which can be taught only in part. The shift of attention from usage and errors to techniques of sentence combining will help. It should give the student more confidence, but beyond that, it will not help him much in finding something to say. Methods of invention are beyond the scope of this piece, though research in problem-solving and in the psychological processes of composition promise to enlighten us in this area. I have said little about the special problems of minority groups which must be considered in light of the whole
RESEARCH AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

Michael R. Brown
Western Michigan University

What does research tell us about the teaching of writing? First it tells us that we need more research. We just do not know enough, with certainty, about the teaching of writing.

Second, because it was not done by specialists and, therefore, does not conform to standard research practice or design, much of the research on the teaching of writing is useless.

Third, the results of any particular study are never wholly applicable to a different situation. This empirical truism has further justification here. Much of the research has been done to improve research techniques rather than teaching. Until recently most research has been done independent of—one is tempted to say in ignorance of, research in other areas, most notably, general teacher effectiveness.

Finally, research is better at telling us what will not work than what will. As Isaac Asimov puts it: "Science is very good at telling us what is not true."

In spite of these disclaimers, some excellent research has been done. Allow me to indicate some of the important resources (since PEN—a delightful acronym—eschews footnotes) and then I will discuss some implications for the teaching of writing.

The basic book is Research in Written Composition (RWC), edited by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer and published by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1965. This book needs to be brought up to date, and proposals have been made, but no action has yet been taken. A partial up-date is Bradock's article on "English Composition" in the Encyclopedia of Education Research. For a comprehensive catalog of more recent work one must go to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The NCATE committee on Research oversees the publication of two series which are more or less helpful. Research in the Teaching of English (RTE), a semi-annual report of new studies, is frequently padded with non-research articles. Qualitatively superior is the series of Research Reports, complete studies in single volumes. Those most applicable to the teachings of writing are No. 10, Transformational Sentence-Combining: A Method for Enlarging the Development of Syntactic in English Composition by John C. Mellon; No. 13, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders by Janet Emig; and No. 15: Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction by Frank O'Hare.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first study to assess the effect of the teaching of grammar on subsequent written production. The overwhelming conclusion of a great body of evidence indicates that "the teaching of formal grammar has negligible or, because it usually displaces some instructional practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing." (RWC, 37-38) We may reasonably include in this prohibition most of the subsystems which seem to comprise effective writing. For example, "Research in spelling is barely touched upon in this report for the simple reason that, however, important accurate spelling may be in the clarity and social acceptability of composition, many of the factors of good spelling do not seem to be closely involved with the factors of good composition. . . . Like spelling, handwriting appears to be a field of research which more often than not has less to do with composition than one might suppose." (RWC, 49-50)

Similarly, L. B. Hagen's study, "An analysis of transitional devices in student writing" (RTE, v. 5, no. 2), concludes: "Since the study shows that the students have an extensive inventory of transitional devices by age 12, it appears a waste of time to teach what is already a basic component of their language structure at levels beyond this age. The goal of the teacher should be . . . to encourage the student to employ the knowledge he already possesses." (p. 200) Emig's study of the composing process reaffirms earlier findings about pre-writing instruction in that people who write professionally do not go about it the same way in which writing is usually taught. Finally, "If a little has been proved about instructional factors influencing composition, it is fair to say that almost nothing has been proved in a scientific sense about the rhetorical aspects of written composition." (RWC, 38).

When we turn from pre-writing instruction to evaluation and the act of writing itself, we turn from those things research tells us not to do and toward some things which provide the basis for some action.

One of the traditional problems of teaching writing has been the unreliability or inconsistency of evaluation. However, researchers needed reliable evaluation as a means of assessing growth in writing skills, and they have devised some methods and guidelines which promote high reliability. The Buxton study (RWC, 58-70) contrasted several methods of evaluating papers and established at least one method by which different evaluators may achieve relatively consistent agreement. "College freshmen whose writing is graded and thoroughly marked and criticized and who revise their papers in the light of these matters can improve their writing more than college freshman whose writing receives a few general suggestions but no grades or intensive marking and who do not revise their papers. . . . Raters who use a scoring system which they understand and endorse, who have practiced rating papers by this system, and who make periodic checks on their rating may achieve a high degree of consistency in rating essays, or themes." (RWC, 69-70) The study provides examples of rating sheets and procedures.

Several other aspects of evaluation are fairly well substantiated by research. W. E. Coffman offers an adaptation of the evaluation research for achieving reliability in grades for essay examinations. (RTE, v. 5, no. 1) Teachers should also be aware that shifting the mode of discourse affects the production of sentence types or structures and may relate directly to judgments of quality. Tentatively, this means that testing in one mode may indicate very little about achievement in another mode.

Although general research in teacher effectiveness would seem to indicate that positive response to student writing has greater effect on the quality of performance than neutral or negative comment, research in this area has not been conclusive.

One final point about evaluation is less tentative. It seems fair to say that good writers vary more in the quality of their products than do poor or mediocre writers. The general conclusion is that it is most equitable to judge a student on his best paper or his best two out of three than on one paper or one final essay.

This last point raises the issue of the distinction between competence and performance and that is one of the three major trends which inform much of the current research on the teaching of writing. Modern linguistic theory, research in general teacher effectiveness, and a positive philosophy about the goodness and purposiveness of human behavior combine in two of the most interesting clusters of experiments being carried on today. The hallmarks of these projects are that they deal with the teaching of written production and general teacher effectiveness in a way which fills the vacuum left by traditional methods and older research studies. (At this point it might be well to note for those of you who have been looking for answers to questions such as how much writing in what modes at what time with what texts, that the information from the research is inconclusive and current directions indicate that responses to such questions are not forthcoming in the near future—unless, of course, you care to do the research.)

Frank O'Hare's study of sentence-combining holds great promise.
sentence-combining methodology proposed by Mellon has been
stripped of its formal grammar component and applied directly to
sentence manipulation. The basic method involves practice in sentence
embedding, frequent and brief oral and written drills and problems,
a supportive classroom climate, but no teaching for direct transfer to
written production. The results were a considerable increase in syn-
tactic maturity in written production (to 12th grade level for 7th
graders). This method should be useful in college to promote greater
stylistic range and fluency beyond that which most people currently
use. The method should be especially useful for those who teach
developmental writing in community colleges and regional state uni-
versities.

In 1969 nearly an entire issue of College English was devoted to
Robert Zoellner's article "Talk-Write: A Behavioral Pedagogy for
Composition." Solidly basing his argument on behavioral psychology,
Zoellner laid the foundation for dealing with scribal activity (written
production) in a very positive way. The idea is to have students talk
about a topic before they write about it. The major limitation has
been that Zoellner has never developed his plan beyond that propo-
sal. At least he has never offered any proof that it works. Now it
appears that T. R. Radcliffe has done the necessary review of the
research, tested and modified the technique, and plans to incorporate
it all into his doctoral dissertation to be completed this year. Based on
a preliminary publication by Radcliffe (RTE, v. 6, no. 2), the final
study should be both impressive and highly useful to college teachers
of writing.

MORE GOLD IN THEM HILLS
William J. Heim
University of South Florida

The Freshman English requirement is being reduced or eliminated
altogether at many universities. An often heard reason is that freshmen
entering four-year institutions are generally brighter these days. Junior
colleges have developed admirable methods of remedial instruction, and
many students in need of such help are choosing to begin their academic
work at these institutions. The fact that so many in-coming freshmen are "CLEP-ing out" would also seem to indicate that Freshman English—
which was usually little more than a watered-down course of readings
in American civilization, sociology, psychology, and more recently,
ecology, and civil disobedience—is not really needed as a requirement
for modern freshmen, who know all about civil disobedience before
they get to college.

The Freshman English Program at the University of South Florida
has at least made extensive alterations in its requirement. It has been made
bigger. We grant that freshmen are bright and that Freshman English
should get out of the sociology-psychology-ecology business, which can
be taught much better by the proper departments. We deny, however,
that the brighter freshmen are able to express their brightness by
writing better than were the, I suppose, dullest freshmen of a few
years ago.

Freshman English at USF had consisted of two courses, four quarter
hours each. The first course required the writing of several single
paragraphs and the reading of several single paragraphs and the reading
of several pieces in one of the many mixed-bag or pop-culture antholo-
gies now on the market. The second course was of the usual com-
position and literature type, with the emphasis usually on literature.

Beginning in quarter 1, 1973, however, the requirement will consist
of three courses of three quarter hours each. This is an increase of only
one hour over the old sequence, but the actual period of time that the
student is writing deliberately and having his writing deliberately
criticized will now be three quarters instead of two. Believing that the
writing of so-called standard English is at least in part a conditioned
response, our Freshman English Committee hopes that if the condition-
ing is longer and more intense, the response will last longer in the
student's academic career and, ideally, may even result in good writing
becoming habitual. More time—not less—is essential for any student
to kick (or foster) his habit.

The first course requires detailed study of an elementary rhetoric
text; students will write extensively in class with the instructor avail-
able to provide immediate help, suggestions, and criticism. No anthol-
ogy of reading will be mandatory but an optional fifty-cent book
of essays will be on hand in the bookstore for instructors who wish
to require outside readings.

The reading of persuasive prose will be required in the second
course. Instead of paragraphs, the student will now write several short
essays analyzing or imitating the techniques of rational and emotional
persuasion found in the readings.

The final course will require three longer writing projects for which
the student will have to do some work in the library. Projects will be
concerned with authors or ideas introduced through reading and discus-
sion of a limited amount of imaginative writing. Some class time will
be given to such discussions, but most time will be spent in individual
conferences devoted to a student's particular project.

At present USF is compelled by state policy to grant total exemption
of the entire sequence to students placing in the upper fifth percentile on the CLEP Composition Examination. We hope to replace
this inadequate test with one that more accurately reflects the content
of a college level course; the next CLEP Freshman English Examination
and writing sample is expected to be adopted, to allow exemption of one or more of the courses in the sequence. We certainly have no
objection to the credit by examination, but we insist on the right to de-
termine the nature of the examination for which credit will be given.

As a consequence, the Freshman English Program at USF is making
an attempt to get back into the business of teaching writing. Some of
us feel that good writing is the logical and unavoidable destination,
after passage through the logical programs we design. Others may
doubt the existence of the better composition course and question the
direct relationship between good writing and the specific content of
the course in which it is produced. Like precious gold mysteriously
appearing in the absurd slang of an alchemist's retort, good writing
breaks out in the English class, and without apparent reason, it is as
likely to select one program as another for the scene of its manifestation.
We are not sure whether our new program is logic or slop, whether
our hopes for it are based on reason or faith, but anticipate that,
at the end of the next academic year, there will be more gold at USF
than there is now.

ON TRAINING TEACHERS OF REMEDIAL ENGLISH
William Lutz
Rutgers University (Camden)

There was a time when remedial English courses were confined
to high schools and junior colleges. Four-year colleges and universi-
ties had little if anything to do with such courses. Here and there
some larger institutions would offer a one-semester, non-credit remedial
course to prepare a student for the regular freshman English course,
but otherwise most of the larger schools confined themselves to be-
moaning the lack of preparation of incoming students. As we all
know, times have changed.

Remedial English courses have become standard fare in colleges
whether they are two-year or four-year institutions. And the remedial
courses that are being offered are changing from the old one-semester
non-credit course into more elaborate sequences of courses, some of
which offer regular academic credit. While the demand for specialists
in Old English is declining, the demand for qualified teachers of
remedial courses seems to be increasing. And such teachers are needed
not only in the traditional junior college market, but also in four-year
colleges. The obvious question is where are these teachers coming
from and how are they being prepared?

Too often the remedial English teacher in the four-year college
is a graduate student, an assistant instructor, or temporary faculty
member. While this may not necessarily be bad, what is unfortunate
is that far too often the remedial English teacher has no special back-
ground or training to prepare him to teach such a course. Just as with
the teaching of freshman English the attitude seems to be that anyone
can teach remedial English. An instructor needs special training in
order to teach American literature, but anyone with a Master's degree
can handle remedial English.
after writing an initial essay, will be placed in one of three programs:

1. a term’s regular work, for the “traditionally prepared” student.
2. a year’s work, for the student who cannot organize and write an essay.
3. a year-and-a-half’s work, for the student who needs compensatory work, beginning at the level of the sentence.

About half of our freshman class consistently fall within the second grouping, while the rest (25 percent and 25 percent) are situated in programs (1) and (3).

Program (1) — English 101 — 3 hrs., 3 credits.

The student who can read and write effectively enters English 101. He studies elementary genres — poetry; novel; drama; essay — and learns to write a term paper on a topic from English or American literature. After this course a student may enroll in any English elective.

Program (2) — English 110 — 5 hrs., 1½ credits and English 111 — 4 hrs., 1½ credits.

The majority of York students are required to take these two courses which parallel English 101 in content and credit, but have additional class hours, devoted to lessons in writing and reading skills.

Program (3) English 100 — 5 hrs., 1 credit and English 110 plus English 111.

Students with limited writing ability enter this one-credit course which concentrates on basic grammar. Upon completion, the student enters Program (2).

Additional alternatives are available, creating incentive and flexibility for the students:

1. An A student in 110 can move to English 112, a term paper writing course with fewer hours and a higher concentration of work; the student is expected to demonstrate his maturity to function independently in reading, writing, researching.

2. An exemption examination is offered to recommended students while they are enrolled in 110. If they pass this essay examination, they are permitted, while still taking 110, to fulfill independently the requirements of 111: additional readings and the term paper. Many students are attracted to this route; few have the discipline to maintain it. Only superior work earns the exemption.

3. The exceptional student, upon completing English 100, may be allowed to re-take the placement examination, in hopes of placing into English 101.

4. Some students with mediocre writing ability and some reading skills are placed in the experimental Communications 103-106 sequence. These two three-credit courses unite the skills common to speaking and writing, while investigating the impact of mass media on society.

Supplementing our basic courses, we have an English-As-A-Second-Language Program, and a voluntary Writing Skills Center with teacher and student tutors. For teachers we provide monthly sessions (Composition Meetings), a departmental Newsletter, and a sympathetic and conscientious Coordinator-Of-Composition.

NEW JOURNAL

Created to provide a forum where composition instructors can talk shop to each other rather informally about students, writing, books, problems, pleasures, and papers, Freshman English Shop Talk invites short “what-I-do-and-how-I-do-it” articles. The issue is especially interested in articles on how to motivate students, how to teach specific skills, how to use journals, how to run open classes, how to construct word games, how to teach invention, and how to teach argument and exposition. Shop Talk also welcomes queries and descriptions of local instructional problems. Annotated lists of books pertinent to the teaching of composition will also be published. Articles should be quite specific, not theoretical, and no longer than 1,000 words. Anyone wishing to review a book should write the editor. All articles and subscriptions should be sent to William E. (Jack) Carpenter Department of English, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66502.

Shop Talk will appear four times a year. Subscription rate will be $2.00 per year.

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Book Review


Although the statistical data presented in The Anatomy of College English may now be severely dated, Thomas Wilcox’s empirically derived descriptions of undergraduate English programs in American four-year colleges and universities is comparable in scope and importance to Don Cameron Allen’s revelations about graduate English programs in The Ph. D. in English and American Literature (1968). Under the sponsorship of the National Council of Teachers of English and with a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Wilcox made his survey during the academic year 1967-68 and supplemented it by three years of subsequent investigation. After conducting on-the-spot interviews at sixty-three colleges and universities, he mailed out a 39-page questionnaire to a scientifically selected random sample of 300 departments, to which he got an extraordinary response from 284 (94.4%) of those departments. In the spring of 1970 after tabulating those responses, he filed a report, A Comprehensive Survey of Undergraduate Programs in English in the United States, with the Bureau of Research, Office of Education, That report, which includes a copy of the questionnaire, ninety-one tables of statistics, and footnotes for all quotations, is available from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, LEAFSCO Information Products, Inc., P. O. Box Drawer O, Bethesda, Maryland 20014 (accession number: ED 044 422).

In the ten chapters of this book, Wilcox reports on the full spectrum of the undergraduate English program — the structure, operation, staffing, governance, and teaching loads of English departments, the general curriculum, the major in English, Freshman English, interdepartmental and other special programs — and in an appendix, provides a checklist of forty questions that “departments may wish to put to themselves as they review their operations and their programs for undergraduates.”

For this periodical, however, I will concentrate on “Freshman English,” the longest chapter (42pp) in the book. I can give an overview of this chapter by listing the sub-heads:

- Magnitude (of the freshman program in the colleges)
- Staging Freshman English
- Remedial English
- Requirements and Exemptions
- Advanced Placement
- Varieties of Freshman English
- Linguistics
- Rhetoric
- Freshman Textbooks
- Innovations
- Freshman Seminars
- Future of Freshman English

For those who have been associated with Freshman English over the last ten years or so, there can hardly be many surprising revelations in Wilcox’s book about any of those facets of the freshman course. What the book can do for them, however, is supply statistical evidence to corroborate what they had gained a sense of from observation, hearsay, and intuition. It doesn’t take much clairvoyance for someone to postulate, for instance, that Freshman English is a huge operation in American colleges and that it pre-empts a sizeable portion of a department’s time, energy, and resources. But it is reassuring—and maybe useful—to have one’s impressions backed up with the statistical evidence that in the fall of 1967, well over a million of the 1,338,474 freshmen enrolled in the 1320 four-year colleges and universities were enrolled in a Freshman English course of some kind, that over 40 percent of a department’s total teaching effort was devoted to this course, and that in 44.2 percent of all schools, every member of the department taught at least one section of the course.
In departments currently debating whether to abolish or retrench their Freshman English requirements, advocates of the course would find it strategically more advisable to cite Wilcox' statistics that in 1967-68, 93.2 percent of the four-year institutions required at least one term of Freshman English and that 77.8 percent of them also required a second term than to cite Michael Cartwright's finding in 1971, in a survey commissioned by ADE and NCTE, that only 58 percent of the 1,122 institutions responding continued to require two terms of Freshman English. It will be interesting to see—and later surveys will have to be commissioned to determine—whether, in the current revolt against all requirements, the freshman course will be further eroded or whether, as has happened cyclically in the past under the pressure of complaints from parents, businessmen, and other departments, the drift away from the Freshman English requirement will once again be reversed. One thing is sure: if the freshman English requirement vanishes, the main raison d'être for the English department's size, power, and lavish budget in the university will vanish too. That consequence could be good or bad, depending on one's views of the purposes and priorities of the educational enterprise.

Thomas Wilcox is not content to be mostly descriptive. For all his objective reporting of the facts about Freshman English, he does not hesitate to pass judgments, to offer recommendations, and to make predictions. And well he might. He is an intelligent, realistic humanist, deeply concerned about the welfare of students and the profession. In the last three sections of the chapter on Freshman English, he reviews some innovative programs that strike him as pointing the way to the revitalization of the freshman course. He detects the ingredients for a bracing tonic in the revamped freshman programs at Earlham, Amherst, Massachusetts, Stanford, Lawrence, Dartmouth, Mills, and Cornell. (It should be noted that only one of those schools is a tax-supported institution.) Teachers, chairmen, and directors of Freshman English will just have to read his descriptions of those programs if they want to discover what those ingredients are.

If I have read Wilcox correctly, I have only one objection to his recommendations. He seems to favor restoring literature as the primary, if not the exclusive, emphasis in the English curriculum. As long ago as 1958, I was converted from my own bias for the literature component by the pronouncement of the Basic Issues Conference that the province of English consisted of literature, language, and composition. To propose that English teachers be allowed or encouraged to teach only what they know best and enjoy most—namely literature—is to abet the abnegation of their full professional responsibility. If English teachers are not competent to teach language and composition, the answer is not to drop those two members of the triad from the curricula but to assist that graduate schools provide prospective teachers with adequate training in all three areas. It is all very well to propose, as Wilcox does, that all teachers in the university be required to teach writing, but that proposal has never been widely adopted, and where it has been adopted, it has never worked for long. If the maintenance of a balanced undergraduate program among literature, language, and composition loses students for English departments, so be it. At least we will have died with our boots on.

Edward P. J. Corbett
Ohio State University

Deadline for Essay Contest:
January 15, 1974

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MOVING OUT: FROM SUBJECTIVE TO OBJECTIVE COMPOSITION
Brian Delaney
Darrell Hurst

Blue Ridge Community College

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 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 writing grows in the direction of higher abstractions: "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. 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 egocentricity, and in doing so, he is no longer constricted 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. More specifically, 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 free write, 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. He, 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 Serling, Program Director for CLEP, the test will be normed this spring and will be available nationally through CLEP test centers in October or November 1975.

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), Marianna 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 skill 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. Serling 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 B. Carpenter
SUNY at Stony Brook

My problem is a familiar one: how to train and supervise fifty or so TA's without burdening myself or 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

TO: Mentor-Observers

FROM: William B. 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 education.

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 writing 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?
2. Questions that contained their own answers?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the TA's personal method or teaching technique? (This is a tricky thing to judge, but an aide 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 teaching 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. What each TA needs is a grammar, a rhetoric, 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," "typ," 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 proof-readers. 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 (?). 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 constricted.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH

[A continuation from the last issue of a question and answer series with three English editors: Richard Welna (Scott, Foresman), 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 a good a job as we once did...able to be of as much service as we once were. In schools where each instructor is allowed individual choice, it is almost impossible for any publisher's salesman to seek out each instructor and inform him of new and forthcoming books. When there is no committee, we find that we must prepare an enormous large 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, 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 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. Finally, 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 an established way of thinking. Many courses will want handbooks and readers, others just readers, readers/rhetorics, rhetorics/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. Iversen
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 futile circling — returning to a point where we began, but rather a spiraling, returning to a similar situation under different circumstances.

The most significant change in the educational scene between 1943 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 vital 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 “Textbooks seem 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— for several reasons, I think. Some people assume the job for the wrong reasons: they want authority or a quick promotion or entrance 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—what 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. Erickson 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 programs, is directly proportionate to the quality and experience of the leadership. When this principle is ignored, programs suffer.

In 1963, in Themes, Theories, and Therapy: 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 those 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 1973 as I taught them in 1963 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 been. I know of no course that has been more constantly rethought 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 NCTE 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 with a systematic review of a decade of my involvement with writings about composition. I see none of this as confusion. 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
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paralyzed. Students do not want to hobble when others have the capacity to walk, run, and leap. As long as Freshman English retains its practical emphasis upon writing and proposes to help students express themselves effectively, it will continue to attract a sizeable following.

After my nine years as an author, I could easily write another dissertation on naiveté, 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 college campuses 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 "Renaissance" 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 gleaning 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 of 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 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 by 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 teaches 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 kow-towing 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 WF's 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.
Last any should misconstrue the intent here, nothing in this paper is intended to derogate or call into question our open-door policy, remedial instruction for those who need it, special consideration for the handicapped, genuine faculty concern for students' welfare, or the general idea of "going the second mile." What is intended is to say that the Doctrine of Accountability and its Evaluation Corollary are valid. They are valid as applied to the Board, to the Administration, to the Faculty, and to our Staff. Why should they be considered less valid when applied to our students? (Reprinted from Texas Junior College Teachers Association Newsletter, Nov., 1972).

The following two letters were written in reply to Jim Corder's review article "On Two Writing Texts, English Peas, 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 this 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 100 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 with 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 animal images 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 Berk
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 diet 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 (237-246). 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) deficits, and I hope clearly defined, relationship — between the invitation to talk on paper and "playing with Stylistic Possibilities" (239-253); between the invitation to talk on paper and "copyreading" (255-264).

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 unhydrom 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 (27-31, 103-127). 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 [not] 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 teachers 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, dramaticists, 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 catalogs, choosing what I'm going to plant in the minds lying still and empty inside the bodies that fill the chairs in my spring classes. 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 pears." These Great goddam 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 puke" 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) bog(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 nauseant reaction to mixing a little joy with school work passes — as most bellaches 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 helping each person become a better writer learns whose writing is incoherent, superficial, fuzzy or general; learns 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; learns who is not a competent copypreader. 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 us new or old ways of pouring 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."

Loa 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. Babble away.

Given the upshot condition 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 own 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 contraries, 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 seated 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 dishevelment), perhaps even authoritarian and pedantic as I drop words like persona 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 with 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 okay 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 plunges 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 some- one else, and the impossibility of ever succeeding, is what we call communication.

*Walker Gibson*

*University of Massachusetts*

**Writing Well. By Donald Hall. Little, Brown and Company, 1973, 324 pp.**

Avoiding gimmicks and jargon, content with the old-fashioned way to be now, 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 brief and now classic Strunk and White.


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 is 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 Hart, 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-
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 subsections 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 clycotton, breaking into the structure of things by repeated speed and force in order to lay bare in words, naturally, unwooded inside 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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JUDGES: Peter Elbow, Evergreen State College

Mina P. Shaughnessy, City College of the City University of New York.

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DEADLINE: January 15, 1974

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(The essay topic has been stated in general terms so that entrants will feel free to deal with whatever aspects of the subject interest them.)