TO ABANDON STANDARD ENGLISH IS TO DIMINISH DEMOCRACY

Jeannette Kinyon
South Dakota School of Mines

Recently one of my freshmen, a student from Liberia, wrote: "In my country are twenty-eight tribes. Each tribe has its own language, not understood by members of other tribes. When we do business in my country, we use English." Explaining the situation in the United States, a young American might write: "In my country are fifty states, comprised of people whose fathers or forefathers came from countries on four continents. Because these people made an effort to learn English, they not only carry on business, but they can communicate with one another and share ideas." Though these comments appear to be true, should the pressures to abandon standard English in college classrooms prevail, the day may come when the people of the United States cannot communicate with one another. Then, instead of a literate electorate able to use the language that has linked fifty separate states into one nation, a powerful elite comprised of those who can use English effectively will control the United States.

Already a comparative few determine thought and action in this country. Estimates vary as to the number currently wielding great influence, but one recent estimate sets the number of people now responsible for the content of newspapers, magazines, radio, television, movies, and thus for the thrust of public opinion at approximately three thousand. As college English teachers accede to the ever-increasing demands by pressure groups and innovators to permit students to ignore the use of standard English in composition classes, the power of the few increases. For as the number of people able to use standard English effectively decreases, fluency acquires greater prestige. Therefore, rather than teaching less standard English for any reason whatsoever, freshman English teachers should make standard English a requisite for every student in composition classes.

To argue in behalf of standard English as indispensable for the preservation of democracy in the United States is not to ignore the values and contributions of minority cultures. Rather it is to recognize their uniqueness and to welcome the enrichment each minority can offer the whole. But it is in standard English only that the values of minority cultures can penetrate the solidified majority culture. Nor is the argument to teach standard English made in ignorance of what those pressures are that urge abandonment of the standard: difficulty, lack of need, and irrelevance for a minority wishing to know only its own culture. If, however, the insights about the nature of life, gained through centuries by the peoples outside of the mainstream of Western European civilization, are to find their way into the majority culture of the United States to change it for the better, the vehicle must be standard English.

Standard English, to quote W. F. Irmscher, The Holt Guide to English, "represents a wide range of formal and informal uses" and "would have to be reinvented if it did not exist." According to Mario Pei, English is the most widely used language if one considers its distribution worldwide, and it is second in number of speakers, "being outstripped only by Chinese." He estimates that out of every ten people in the world only one is a native speaker of English. How unfair, then, to anyone born in the United States to encourage him to speak or to write — at least as a college student — anything but standard English.

By accepting less than standard English in composition courses, college English teachers encourage all those who are urging other language usage in high school and elementary school. At present, perhaps, the acceptance of something else appears easy or expedient, but ultimately the free flow of ideas, possible and necessary in a democracy, cannot take place when any group of native citizens lacks the tool or skill to use the tool. The tool that makes democracy possible in the United States is standard English, which functions to the advantage of everyone, provided each citizen knows the language of his country.

Standard English can help solve the real energy crisis in the United States — the dearth of ideas. For too long the few have been making decisions for the many; for too long the elite have ignored the riches that lie in the multiplicity of the American experience. From the limitless supply of ideas and experiences can come the power to rejuvenate America. Like any great, but unexplored, resource, this wealth must be discovered and mined before it can be transferred into power to meet the crisis. To convert the resources buried within the multiple ethnic and cultural groups in the United States, members of these groups must be able to use standard English. No other vehicle can bring their treasure to all the people of the nation. As long as something other than standard English is acceptable in colleges in the United States, the true wealth of the nation will lie dormant, the idea crisis will accelerate, and the elitists will continue to wield undue influence.

As English teachers, we have a responsibility to teach standard English to every student because our country needs each student's ideas. In addition we must teach standard English because it is the birthright of every citizen. We must encourage each young person to think in English, to speak English, and to write English. To do this we must teach vocabulary, the rudiments of grammar and spelling, and the conventions of punctuation. If we fail to teach these essentials to any student, we subject him to intimidation in the presence of those who can use the language, to ridicule if he expresses himself poorly, and to the control of those who use the language for their own selfish interests.

It seems to me that when we accede to demands to recognize another language as a first language, to permit the use of jargon or of a non-standard dialect of English, we approve a provincialism both self-defeating and divisive. One need only recall the prophetic nature of the objections of James Joyce to the use of Gaelic in Ireland. Though Gaelic may have nationalized the Irish, it has also set the Irish apart from other English-speaking peoples, and others (in any great number) have not attempted to learn Gaelic in order to appreciate Irish literature or culture. Rather, when the Irish have wished to communicate with an audience wider than that in their own small island, they have written in English. In Canada the use of a language other than English has proven divisive. In Hawaii, where Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese, Hawaiian, Tagalog, Korean, Samoan, and Pidgin, as well as English, are spoken, communication would break down completely were each ethnic group to use only its own language. Fortunately English is used in Hawaii to unite many people. All the peoples in a democracy suffer when any of them are unable to use a common language successfully.

In the United States a person who belongs to a minority group may command a wide audience when he uses standard
English. In our community Dr. Shu-t’ien Li, emeritus professor of civil engineering, is an example of one who writes for such an audience. A native of China, Dr. Li is a force for constructive thinking because of his ability to express his thoughts in English, which makes them accessible to people around the world. Using the language well, Dr. Li writes on topics of community interest, as well as on subjects related to his special field. Had Dr. Li chosen to live in this country and yet refused to learn English, the number of people with whom he could share his ideas would be minimal. Furthermore, because of the language barrier, the loss of Dr. Li’s expertise would be detrimental to the welfare of our community and to the wider audience with whom he can communicate in English.

The loss of any good idea which cannot be shared because a person lacks the language spoken by the majority is a detriment to our country. Multiplicity, the unique characteristic of the United States, where something other than a common background has united people, has special benefits when many people can express many viewpoints clearly in a language all people know. Surely it is also understandable that people of minority cultures wish their children to be able to understand the values of the minority culture and often the language, too. It is commendable that Chinese parents provide for their children to learn about their Chinese heritage, provided the children can communicate with children from other backgrounds. Many Jewish people believe that they can appreciate their heritage more if they learn Hebrew, and this experience is valuable, but they must also communicate in the language of the majority of the people of the United States. The Hutterites in South Dakota and the Amish in Pennsylvania are but two other ethnic, or religious, groups that use other languages in addition to standard English. The examples of these minorities can serve as models for American Indians or Chicanos or any others now urging the abandonment of standard English. No one of any race or creed should lack the opportunity to learn about his cultural heritage or the language of his forebears, but this right cannot supersede an even more basic one — to learn to use well the standard English of the United States.

What we need in the United States are not fewer speakers and writers of standard English, but more of them — knowledgeable and articulate. Since a comparatively few people in the United States determine the thinking of the approximate 200,000,000 even though standard English is taught in most colleges, how dismal are the prospects for a freer flow of communication if any native Americans are encouraged to use either a language or a dialect understood by a minority only. We cannot afford in a democracy the loss of any viewpoint; such a loss, however, is precisely what we may expect whenever we limit the opportunity of any person for any reason whatsoever to learn standard English. We are not, contrary to the belief held by some professors today, helping individuals nor are we promoting democracy. We are instead sowing the seeds for the further deterioration of communication among individuals and for the rise of oligarchy in our nation.

BRINGING OCCUPATIONAL AND TRANSFER STUDENTS TOGETHER

Jay Silverman
Virginia Highlands Community College

Normal practice in the Virginia Community College System, as in many other community colleges, is to offer separate freshman English courses for students in occupational and transfer programs. At Virginia Highlands Community College, in Abingdon, we have combined the courses for two-year occupational and two-year transfer students into a student-centered program and no longer offer the non-transfer course. (We do offer a special one-quarter course for students in one-year certificate programs, but allow these students to take the transferable course — with an hour a week extra work — if they wish.)

Originally we taught both courses, but found that this limited the students’ flexibility in program selection. Many students took non-transfer English and later decided to transfer. So that these students would not have to repeat English, we found ourselves giving “credit by examination” and making other special arrangements. We realized that they had learned most of the things the transfer students had learned, that, in fact, the minimum skills we required for passing both courses were about the same. We felt the specialized needs of students in different programs could be met in concentrated courses offered as the third part of a three-quarter sequence.

We also began to question the distinction between “transfer” and “occupational” students. The occupational course, because its credits could not transfer, was usually assumed to be in some sense inferior. Yet these students, partly because they had a stronger or more specific sense of purpose in their education, wrote as well and participated as actively as transfer students, and we could draw no clear distinctions between the quality of the two groups’ work. Furthermore, we felt that in a minimally competitive classroom situation — what James Moffett calls a “student-centered” class — students from different programs, students planning to assume different roles in society, could learn a great deal from each other. And in particular, they could learn a wider range of language skills.

We designed the following program:

During the first of three quarters, the students keep journals or “writers’ notebooks,” writing primarily about their own interests. They examine each other’s writing in small groups. The aim of the course is for them to develop a personal style and to become aware of language as a medium. During this quarter we also require that they demonstrate (in their writing) a “basic competence” in spelling, usage, and grammar. Students who do not have this minimum competence are required to take three hours (non-transfer credits) of supervised study — small-group meetings with their regular English teacher, to go over in detail each paper they write.

The second quarter of the sequence is designed to teach students to develop and explain responses to a topic and to organize these responses. Students are given a choice of several courses during this quarter — all with the same writing goals. Among the options offered are “Media,” “Contemporary Issues,” and “Field Studies” (in which they write about different aspects of the community and different people in the community). Although this allows students some choice of what they’ll be writing about, in all three courses we are concerned with how they develop responses to the given topics.

The third quarter of the sequence offers even wider options, according to the student’s program. Occupational students take either Business English or Technical Writing (non-transfer courses). Transfer students take a course which teaches aware-

PRIZE-WINNING ESSAY
IN NEXT ISSUE
ness of style (especially tone of voice and metaphor) in both writing and reading.

This program is now in its second year of operation. Student evaluations have been consistently high; freshman English is probably more demanding than it has ever been, but it is no longer considered a bore, a painful repetition of topics already over-taught in high school. So far there has been no division — either in class discussion or in final grades — between occupational and transfer students. Above all, we’ve found that our students who’ve had a student-centered freshman program are writing personal and sophisticated prose in their sophomore literature courses.

We feel that we’ve provided our students with a maximum range of options for developing their language skills, and that we’ve also allowed ourselves, as teachers, a range of approaches by means of which we all work toward the same goals.

IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS
J. Karl Nicholas
Western Carolina University

The in-class writing assignment has become a standard part of the curriculum for all composition courses; indeed, some syllabi call for all freshman themes to be written in class — often on special paper provided by the instructor. The usual reason cited for this practice is that it will prevent plagiarism or collaboration. What a student writes in class, under the watchful eye of his instructor, is bound to be his own work.

While this procedure does insure that the instructor is getting the student’s own work, it in no way insures that he is getting the student’s best work; in fact, it almost guarantees the opposite. The traditional methods of teaching composition make writing a difficult enough chore without the extra pressure of a time limit. The emphasis given correct usage makes the student overly error-conscious, with the result that he cracks his knuckles, scratches his head, exhales a great deal — and writes very little, for fear of committing a blunder that will be penalized. The results of such writing assignments are predictable — short themes, seldom longer than four paragraphs, full of sweeping, poorly supported generalizations.

So far as I can see, these exercises offer little or no benefit to the student. They are at best frustrating — mere annoyances that must be borne — and at worst harmful — galvanizing students against English for the remainder of their college careers. Their only real benefit is the relief they provide the instructor. Because the papers are always short, they are easy to correct. Because the papers are written in class (7 to 9 of them per quarter, 10 to 12 of them per semester), they preclude the need to prepare a lesson.

There are, I think, some remedies for these problems.

1. Concerning the frustration involved in in-class writing — most of it stems from the customary use of rule oriented grammar. We write badly because we speak badly, and in order to improve the former, we must first improve the latter. We study the traditional prescriptions so that we can rid our speech of its barbarisms. Then our speech, once purified, is suitable for writing. This practice inculcates in the student a sense of insecurity — there is something the matter with the way he talks. His composing voice becomes a pathetic little thing stuck with fear and trembling as he mentally ruffles through the usage prescriptions each time he touches pencil to paper. His mind is focused more on form than on content, and it is not surprising that the final product is abbreviated and shallow.

What we need to recognize is that spoken and written English are not the same. The reference grammars that we use in class bear witness to that fact. If spoken English did not occasionally say, “Everybody ate their cookies,” there would be no need for the usage prescriptions. The only real use for a reference grammar is the one the instructor makes of it when he corrects papers, editing out the improprieties that occur in student writing. These improprieties are nothing more than intrusions of spoken forms into written English. We need to let the student use his reference grammar in the way that is most profitable. We must encourage him to write (and to write a great deal) in the language he is most comfortable in using — then to edit that production into standard written English with the aid of his reference grammar. Unfortunately, this type of exercise is not suited to the in-class assignment. The initial draft may be done in class; the editing may be done in class. But we should not expect both to be done during one class period.

2. Concerning the large number of class hours taken up in theme-writing — I doubt seriously that we would realize much improvement in student writing if the time were spent in lecturing. And I am certainly not against giving the beleaguered instructor a break. The time could, however, be spent very profitably if it were devoted to exercises in editing. An excellent procedure is to have students submit their themes on ditto masters. With copies supplied to each student, class time may be spent analyzing the papers, practicing the techniques of editing. Students profit considerably from the exchange of ideas, and the instructor enjoys something of a respite from paper correcting.

The distributing of papers for editing exercises offers yet another advantage not to be overlooked. It supplies the student with a larger audience, one whose attitudes and prejudices he can measure. It does away with the extremely artificial situation posed by the usual freshman theme, written strictly for the eye of the instructor, catering solely to his crotchets.

Freshman English News is published three times a year at Texas Christian University. Subscription rates for one year is $2.00. Subscriptions, queries, and books for review should be sent to the Editor. News items and articles about four-year colleges should be sent to the Editor. News items and articles about two-year colleges should be sent to the Two-Year College Editor. Preference will be given to brief articles and news stories. Footnotes will not be printed; please incorporate citations and references into the body of the text.

Editor ........................................... Gary Tate
Dept. of English
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas 76129

Associate Editor ............................ Priscilla Tate
Texas Christian University

Assistant Editor .............................. Arthur Pritchard
Tarrant County Junior College

Two-Year College Editor ................. Lynn Quitman Troyka
Queensborough Community College
Bayside, New York 11364

Field Editors: Barbara Agonia (Clark Community College); Dee Brock (El Centro Community College); John Clark (University of South Florida); Joseph Comprone (University of Cincinnati); Brian Delaney (Blue Ridge Community College); Frances Franklin (Cuyahoga Community College); William A. Fry (Prince George’s Community College); Richard Gebhardt (Fondley College); Robert Heferman (Dean Junior College); Walter Hodges (Mesa Community College); Paul Naylor (Grand Prairie Regional College); Don Tighe (Valencia Community College).
WHAT'S WORKING WELL FOR US

CHARLES E. DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

What pleases me most about what we have recently done in freshman English concerns our second-semester course. We have established general guidelines for organization of subject matter and minimum requirements for writing; within these guidelines and requirements we allow experienced graduate assistants to design their courses, though first-year assistants must choose among previously approved syllabi.

Early in the first semester, an eligible graduate assistant submits a description of what he would like to offer, including an outline of the course, its purpose and justification within our guidelines, general methodology, specific forms of evaluation, and an annotated bibliography of textual materials, including their cost and availability. This course outline is approved or rejected or modified by an elected committee of fellow freshman English instructors and approved outlines are submitted to the Freshman English Committee for review and then on to the Director of Freshman English. All of this has to be completed early enough for the fall book order and the spring listing of courses.

I am pleased with this program because I see graduate assistants (and senior faculty too) spending much more time planning their courses and thinking through the problems of offering a unified course. I am particularly pleased that more emphasis and forethought are being given to evaluating students. I believe all these efforts contribute to stronger courses, built on the strength and enthusiasm of the staff and the interest of the students. I hope that one of the effects of this shift will be a stronger first-semester course too, because teachers now have even more reason to want a soundly prepared student in the second semester.

* * *

BERT HITCHCOCK
AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Two components of our Freshman English program at Auburn come to mind in answer to the question of what we have done most successfully in the last two or three years to improve instruction in writing. The first, an addition to the program, is the Composition Laboratory; the second, perhaps more modification than addition, is our present training program for new graduate teaching assistants.

With restrictive, selective University admissions, the mean ACT scores of entering freshmen impressively above the national norm, and, most important, a dramatic decrease in failures in freshman English courses, the decision was made to eliminate the remedial course in freshman writing beginning with the 1966-67 academic year. While such a move was probably justified, we found, however, that we still had students with deficiencies which individual teachers of regular classes could not effectively remedy. The beginning of a solution appeared with the department’s participation in the TTT project of Auburn’s School of Education, a project in which individualized instruction was a primary concern. After conducting an experimental workshop class, TTT and the English Department maintained a general freshman composition laboratory during the 1972-73 academic year, and based on its success, the English Department began operating this year, with a full-time director, its own Composition Laboratory.

Advertised as offering supplemental instruction to freshman English students with basic writing deficiencies, and occupying a specially designed room in the English classroom area, the Comp Lab proffers a sympathetic ear and significant help with composition 30 to 40 hours a week. The setup, like the underlying philosophy, is simple. While we have a large supply of auto- and semi-auto-instructional texts available, the main factor is the direct personal one; while solitary exercises may be assigned after diagnosis of particular writing problems, the emphasis always comes back to one-to-one conversation and explanation. Students may either be referred to the Lab by Freshman English instructors or, as they are encouraged to do, simply come in on their own. In both referral and “walk-in” categories our fall quarter business was brisk — over 250 students and over 500 separate visits. Results, though not formally studied, were gratifying and, in some ways, unusual. We found ourselves giving supplementary explanation and valuable new perspectives to students with not so basic but still very troubling composition problems (one Lab visitor has been given revised placement in Honors Freshman English for next quarter), and we were able to do more than ever before for non-native speakers who have to take our regular courses. Very important as well as most satisfying, too, is the growing sense that the Lab is something of a professional center, a place where Freshman English teachers may gather and learn more about the teaching of writing through talking with colleagues and through assisting students from other courses who are experiencing problems in composition.

Concern about the inadequate preparation of most first-year graduate students for teaching composition has been reflected at Auburn for a number of years in a "program of assistance and evaluation" for beginning teaching assistants. Although we have never been able to institute the "apprentice system" giving no new teacher full responsibility for a class the first quarter (an arrangement which was recommended in a 1967 departmental study), we have had a program of regular weekly meetings, class visitations, and the pairing of inexperienced teachers with capable, experienced instructors. Within the past two years, however, some modifications and additions have come about which, I think, have significantly improved the aid we give to new teaching assistants. Helped by the decision to begin our textbook adoption year in the summer rather than in the fall, we now get syllabi and texts into the hands of new teachers some two to three months before their baptism of fire in the classroom. A simple matter, but a very important one in several respects, it seems to me. Less simple but also evincing practical, immediate concerns, was the initiation this fall of a Freshman English Faculty Workshop, two and a half days of introduction and orientation followed by a Waldenian social. Perhaps, however, the major change in our training program has been the dropping of the informal weekly gatherings and the placing into our required Introduction to Graduate Study course a half-quarter component in the teaching of composition. Offering the possibility for a much more substantive as well as theoretical, a professional as well as academic, approach, this arrangement still “has a few wrinkles to be ironed out,” to quote one of this year’s students.

The major paper of this part of the course this year — a comparative review of Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, McCrimmon’s Writing with a Purpose, and Macrorie’s Telling Writing — an assignment impossible under the former system, gained unanimous approval and appreciation. From this graduate credit course, as indeed from all aspects of the so-called training program, we feel that not just our composition students but freshmen far removed from Auburn and 1973-74 can and should benefit.

We know very well that with the Composition Laboratory and the expanded program for beginning assistants we have not solved all the problems of Freshman English. But we are working toward solutions and looking toward perfection. That we can point to a couple of specifics is, amongst diurnal frustrations, very gratifying.
"This is one of the best reference works about the use of the English language that I have seen in many years. It will be of value to any writer, student or professional, not just to the freshman in college."

Richard L. Larson, Lehman College of the City University of New York

THE
RANDOM HOUSE
HANDBOOK
Frederick Crews

Frederick Crews
University of California at Berkeley

December, 1973
448 pages
$5.95

RANDOM HOUSE
THE COLLEGE DEPARTMENT 437 HAHN ROAD WESTMINSTER, MARYLAND 21157
Established in 1947 to bring quality texts and introductions for major literary figures to the college classroom.

- a thirty-six year tradition
- nearly 150 titles available
- texts by leading scholars and teachers

QUALITY AND ECONOMY

WHY NOT THE BEST? Superior texts and introductions—plus bargain prices. COMARE—that select the best and most economical.

For instance, complete works at just $1.25

Milton: PARADISE LOST, Northrop Frye, Ed.
Crane: THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE, William Gibson, Ed.
Swift: GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, John Ross, Ed.
Brontë: WUTHERING HEIGHTS, Mark Schorer, Ed.
Dickens: GREAT EXPECTATIONS, 2/e, Earle Davis, Ed.
Hawthorne: THE SCARLET LETTER, Austin Warren, Ed.
Melville: MOBY DICK, Newton Arvin, Ed.
Thoreau: WALDEN and ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, N. H. Pearson, Ed.
Hesse: STEPPENWOLF, Joseph Mileck, Ed.
Twain: THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, Lionel Trilling, Ed.
Dante: THE DIVINE COMEDY, H. Huse, Ed.

and a dozen more

For instance, collections at just $1.95

Shakespeare: FIVE PLAYS, Alan S. Downer, Ed.
Pope: SELECTED POETRY AND PROSE, 2/e, William K. Wimsatt, Jr., Ed.
Carlos Baker, Ed.
Hawthorne: SELECTED TALES AND SKETCHES, Revised, Hyatt Wadgasser, Ed.
Whitman: LEAVES OF GRASS AND SELECTED PROSE, Sculley Bradley, Ed.
Keats: SELECTED POETRY AND LETTERS, Revised, Richard Fogle, Ed.
Shelley: SELECTED POETRY AND PROSE, Kenneth Cameron, Ed.
Emerson: SELECTED POETRY AND PROSE, 2/e, Reginald Cook, Ed.
Frost: POETRY AND PROSE, E. C. Lathem and Lawrence Thompson, Eds.
James: SELECTED SHORT STORIES, Revised and Enlarged, Quentin Anderson, Ed.

and a dozen more

For advanced courses, texts are priced at either $2.95 or $3.95

FOR COMPLETE RINEHART EDITION LISTINGS AND EXAMINATION COPIES, WRITE TO:

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
383 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10017
Harriett Nolte, Assoc. Editor, English
Teachable?

YES! They're from Winthrop—

Just published—

□ rhetorical:
Flanigan, APPROACHES TO EXPOSITION: WHAT, HOW AND WHY
Gives the student unification and support—control of his writing—by application of one or more of these approaches. Instructor's Manual available. 264 pp., $4.95

□ thematic/rhetorical reader:
Brent and Lutz, RHETORICAL CONSIDERATIONS: ESSAYS FOR ANALYSIS
Provides unusual adaptability to differing needs through combination of authors' instruction, illustration in a wide variety of carefully chosen essays, and thematic concerns interesting to the student. Instructor's Manual available. 592 pp., $5.95

1973's effective ones—

□ rhetorical:
Paull and Kligerman, INVENTION: A COURSE IN PRE-WRITING COMPOSITION
Combines perception of Pre-Writing with communication of Composition through classroom exercises and journal-keeping. 192 pp., $4.95

□ thematic/rhetorical reader:
Gillespie and Stanley, SOMEONE LIKE ME: IMAGES FOR WRITING
Integrates careful rhetorical guidance into thematic presentation of essays, short stories, and poems for writing development. Instructor's Manual available. 329 pp., $4.95

□ rhetorical reader:
Tate, FROM DISCOVERY TO STYLE: A READER
Leads to effective writing through brief instruction and motivation keyed to fresh, stimulating essays. Instructor's Manual available. 384 pp., $4.95

For your consideration copies, please write to:
Richard T. Marran
WINTHROP PUBLISHERS, INC.
17 Dunster Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02138
LANGUAGE AWARENESS

Paul A. Eschholz, Alfred F. Rosa, and Virginia P. Clark, editors

A new anthology of thirty-six lively essays, accompanied by abundant questions for discussion and suggestions for writing, that lead students to an awareness of the many ways in which, for better or worse, their language shapes their own experience and affects the lives of others. The readings are presented in five sections: Perspectives, Language and Occupations, Prisoners of Language, Influencing Language, Prospects. Instructor's Manual available.

March 1974  about 356 pages, paperbound  $3.95 (tentative)

EIGHT MODERN ESSAYISTS,
Second Edition

William S. Smart, editor

Like its highly successful predecessor, the new Second Edition of Eight Modern Essayists holds to the principle that the best way to learn to write is by studying outstanding writers in depth. Accordingly, Professor Smart presents from three to five essays by each of the following masters of the form: E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Edmund Wilson, F. R. White, George Orwell, Norman Mailer, and James Baldwin. Instructor's Manual available.

1973  384 pages, paperbound  $4.50

CITY LIFE: Writing from Experience

William Makely, editor

A provocative new anthology for composition courses in urban colleges, City Life invites students to explore and write about their own and others' experiences of the city. The readings, which are followed by questions and suggestions for writing, are presented in six sections: City Places, City People, City Experiences, The Way It Was, The Way It Is, The Way It Will Be.

February 1974  about 256 pages, paperbound  $3.95 (tentative)

If you wish to consider any of these books for adoption, please write for a complimentary examination copy.

St. Martin's Press
P.O. Box 5352, New York, New York 10017
ROBERT A. MILLER
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

The composition teacher who discovers that there is nothing new in the teaching of composition often thinks that this discovery is itself new, and the complacency and cynicism that may follow this discovery can be fatal to the teacher’s course. If that teacher happens also to be a director of a composition program taught by many others, so much the worse.

We haven’t done anything “new” in Freshman English at Purdue, but we have brought new life to our large program (about 5,000 freshmen in composition each year), and many of us are rediscovering that writing is essential to education, that it can and should be taught in Freshman English, that teaching, learning, and writing, taken together, can be sources of pleasure as well as intellectual growth for teacher and student alike.

Our program for years had been conventional, and, I think, conventionally good. It was at least strong enough to enable us to survive the troubles of the 60’s, including the blandishments of colleagues in some sister institutions engaged in the then fashionable dismantling of their composition courses for one reason or another.

But in 1970 we re-examined our freshman offerings in order to develop a special course for students with low SAT verbal scores. The English 100 we came up with has had effects on morale, teaching techniques, course administration, attitudes toward Freshman English, and departmental public relations that go far beyond the course itself. Details of the course, currently being described at national meetings by its coordinator, LaVerne Gonzalez, are available from her. Here I will merely say that the course is taught in small classes (15-16 students) by a small staff of teaching assistants led by a dedicated teacher serving as coordinator; and that the approach is eclectic in the extreme, the advice of Ken Macrorie, Hans Guth, Lou Kelly, among others, and the combined experience of the teachers themselves having a part in it.

The approach is certainly not new. (It reminds me, in fact, very much of the Rhetoric courses taught before the turn of the century in the land-grant colleges of the Midwest.) But the important point is that it was new for us at the time, and it had more salutary effects upon our entire program than I could possibly enumerate here.

My conclusion is not new either: Probably the best thing that can happen to a well-established Freshman English program is to change it; there are no new ways to teach composition — and certainly no ideal ways — but we must keep up the search for them if we are to keep ourselves and our students alive and learning.

WEBB SALMON
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

The advice of a knowledgeable former English chairman is partly responsible for whatever success Florida State’s Freshman Writing program has had. He said we could conduct a good program using Teaching Assistants if we would (1) select the best TA’s available, (2) train the inexperienced ones before letting them teach, and (3) operate a good advisement program. All of his recommendations are now in effect.

The TA Selection Committee uses conventional criteria: letters of recommendation, GPA’s, GRE’s. But the freedom of the committee to recruit the best candidates may be a bit unusual. A senior professor may of course recommend his students, but he will not insist that they be appointed. Nor will the chairman usurp the authority of his Selection Committee.

Thus the committee members, who represent both the freshman teaching and the graduate study programs, are free and obligated to appoint the very best people they can and to decide, with advice from the TA advisers, whether anyone should not be reappointed.

A graduate student cannot become a TA in our program unless he has had at least a year’s applicable teaching experience or has taken, with the help of a small stipend, our summer training program for teachers of freshman composition. Trainees learn about various approaches to teaching writing, write papers utilizing principles they will teach, observe freshman classes, do some practice teaching, learn to grade papers, and begin thinking of themselves as teachers. If a trainee’s work in linguistics has been weak, he takes an introductory course right away. After a new TA has taught for a term or two and is ready to apply in his freshman class what he can learn in a graduate course in modern rhetorical theory, he is encouraged to take this course.

The kinds of advisement we offer to TA’s are not unusual: class visitation, checking of marked papers, private conferences, staff meetings in large and small groups, written evaluations available to the TA’s. But the method of selecting advisers deserves attention. The department chairman confers with the writing director before appointing advisers. No professor will be appointed unless he is considered a good teacher himself and unless he enjoys working with TA’s. This year’s group includes assistant, associate, and full professors, including the former chairman cited earlier. Since an adviser is given credit for a course on his teaching load, his advisees know that he is not only eager but obligated professionally to help them develop into fine teachers.

Selecting, training, and advising our Freshman Writing teachers carefully — these seem to be the characteristics of our program that we value most.

ALEXANDER J. BUTRYM
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

The major successful innovation we’ve introduced at Seton Hall is likely to seem reactionary to some people concerned with Freshman programs. Two of us (Ed Winans and I) were named Coordinators of Freshman English with instructions to provide unity or coherence — structure of some sort — to a course which had deteriorated into a do-what-you-will, catch-as-catch-can sort of affair. We were supposed to be teaching writing, but the amount of writing demanded in any section varied from instructor to instructor between 12 themes and no themes at all. Some sections became courses in gerund-grinding, unresponsive to student desires; others became advanced literature courses, unresponsive to student needs.

What we’ve done to make order out of this chaos is to adopt (with the rest of the department’s approval, of course) a substantial handbook for writers and an essay reader. This year we’re using Gorrell and Laird’s handbook and the Gorrell, Laird and Freeman reader. In addition, to supply matter for themes for those teachers who feel a need to teach something literary, the department adopted, as a teacher’s option, the Barnet, Berman and Burto Introduction to Literature. Those teachers who feel that their students need drills in developing writing skills can also use the Gorrell and Laird workbook. In addition, Ed and I put together a fairly full syllabus which each instructor is supposed to follow — although not religiously — week by week as a guide to what ought to be treated during the semester. We require each instructor to assign, collect, grade, and return a specific number of papers.
Obviously, we do not see Freshman English as a liberalizing or humanizing course. It is a tool. Students need it to successfully complete their four years at Seton Hall. (The Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted last November to drop all required core courses except EN 9 and 10. In other words, specific requirements in philosophy, history, math, science and the rest are out. Only EN 9 and 10 are required.)

As Co-ordinators, Winans and I spend a lot of time talking to teachers (26 of them) about assignments that work or don’t work, about things in the texts that are good, bad, or indifferent, about the relative emphasis that ought to be placed on various aspects of the course, and so forth. We pass suggestions around and generally act as clearing-houses for information and recommendations. We get the brunt of the bookmen and try to feed and nurture our graduate assistants.

The effect of all this is that the course now has purpose, or at least it seems to have a tendency toward having purpose. Freshman English is a service course; it is mandated upon the Department by the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences and the rest of the University. At the same time, each faculty member is free to pursue that purpose with the best means available. Our main innovation, then, is that we decided to teach writing, assumed it can be taught in many ways, and settled on reasonable standards of performance.

* * * * *

W. GEORG ISAAC
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA (DAVIS)

When in the Fall of 1968 I stepped into the newly created position of Supervisor of Freshman English at the University of California at Davis, I took on the job of directing a faculty twice as large as that of the English Department and a program of courses considerably more varied than one expects to find in Freshman English.

Supervision led to teacher training. Faced with the choice of teaching a demonstration class or offering a lecture course on how to teach writing on a college level, I opted for the former and took on a section of Freshman Composition with an enrollment of twenty-two freshmen and six graduate students.

Sitting in the back row, pens in hand, the would-be teachers of college English formed a rather solemn and quizzical, as I imagined, audience. To create participation I began calling upon them for comments and gave each the job of correcting and grading several student papers. Involvement was achieved but my teaching load increased. For in addition to my regular class preparation I had to correct the corrections and evaluate the evaluations made by my newly acquired teaching assistants, who were also required each to teach two classes once the course was well under way.

The student T.A.'s found this initiation into teaching a worthwhile experience, but the freshmen complained about having too many teachers.

When in the Fall of 1969 twenty-five graduate students enrolled in English 390 (Teaching of English on the College Level), I decided to teach the class on a lecture-discussion basis, meeting with the group once a week and, in addition, requiring each student to observe one meeting of a Freshman English section. During the ten class meetings of the quarter, I put the class through ten classroom experiences simulating the teaching of composition, beginning with the first confrontation with the class ("Imagine that you have just walked into your classroom in Freshman Composition . . . . What will you say first?") Answer: "Tell the class what expository writing is, how many papers they will have to write, what the reading requirement will be." "What will you have the class do next?" Answer: "Have them write a paragraph in class with-
Also, T.A.'s attend monthly seminars in composition, which are open to all faculty, to discuss theories and practices in composition, rhetoric, and methodology. The seminars are not directed specifically at the T.A.'s. Periodically, however, we do hold meetings for the T.A.'s and their supervisors to discuss problems related to teaching assistants.

At the end of the semester, each T.A. writes a letter evaluating his or her semester's experience and noting strengths and weaknesses in the program. Our T.A.'s report mostly positive reactions to the program, noting especially the benefits of working closely with a faculty member. Their largest complaint is lodged against the ambivalent role they must play—both student and instructor. While we probably will never feel that the program is totally successful, we believe our graduating T.A.'s are a good deal better prepared to teach composition than most of us were at the same age.

**A FRESHMAN ENGLISH PROGRAM THAT WORKS**

_Susan Commanday_
_Rockland Community College_

If you were chairman of a college English department, how would you create a Freshman English program to "turn on" rather than "turn off"? Henry Larom, English chairman at Rockland Community College, S.U.N.Y., decided to hire as many actively producing writers as possible. "If you don't know the pain of writing, how can you teach it," he asks.

In these days of over-abundant Ph.D.'s, Professor Larom has been able to collect the kind of staff which would have been unobtainable in a community college only a few years ago: a man who lectured on Samuel Beckett at Yale, the established translator of a Belgian playwright, a Jamesian who studied under Leon Edel. Many members of the English department have Ph.D.'s and almost all have to their credit one or more publications.

Although the presence of scholars rarely assures the success of an institution's Freshman English program, a fact to which many older and more prestigious colleges can attest, RCC does have great success teaching Freshman English.

One resource Rockland possesses which many schools perhaps do not is a large number of young, publishing, creative writers who are teaching not only upper division literature courses but ordinary Freshman English. In any given issue of publications such as _The London Review, Raritan, Southern Poetry Review, The Beloit Poetry Journal_, there is apt to be a poem by Dan Masterson, John Allman, or Tom Artin. Masterson's work is in the new Random House anthology, _Contemporary Poetry in America_. Barbara Unger's list of credits resembles an index to the little poetry magazines (_Treet_, _Screew_). Bill Blake has won an O. Henry award for one of his many stories, and is about to publish a novel. Larom is himself a writer—he has published six novels for young people about the American West—and, at an age when many begin to look forward to retirement, has begun to write poetry.

And it is with a poet's sensibility, not an administrator's, that Larom organizes his department—giving his staff the greatest possible latitude. There is no standardization of method or goal imposed by the chairman, no syllabus, no comprehensive exam for all sections of 101 and 102. No two sections are taught alike. One instructor begins the term without texts. He devises imaginative situations about which students must write ("Raise your eyes and picture a TV screen on the ceiling. What do you see?""); when students read their work aloud, no negative comments are permitted for half a term. Some instructors work from collections of expository writing, some from anthologies of tales, poems and plays. Some use workbooks and grammar handbooks, and one holds no classes at all, but conducts individual tutorials. Students are free to transfer, during the first part of the term, from one section to another, if they are uncomfortable with a particular method.

Since so many of those who teach Freshman English are practicing writers, one does not encounter the view that such a course is either trivial or routine. The excitement these writers feel about language is communicated even to the most traditionally-academic members of the department. In fact, there has been a recent rash of poetry-writing among those of us who haven't written for years. From the top of the department down, the emphasis is on teaching and writing a living language.

I understood clearly why Larom feels creative writers communicate a special quality to the teaching of Freshman English only after I invited Dan Masterson into my classroom to discuss how one can use one's own experience as material from which to write. On that occasion he described how he'd tried impulsively to rescue a young deer which had tumbled through thin ice into a pond a few feet from his house. Masterson too fell into the pond, and he and the deer began to drown together; Janet Masterson saved her husband, finally, risking her life to pull him from the freezing water while the two small Masterson children watched their parents' struggle. From this came the poem "Rescue." Masterson's intense desire to communicate the essence of his experience—and to do so through controlled, carefully chosen language—taught my students better than any chapter in any handbook what writing is for. The quality of work these students produced after Masterson's single visit improved significantly.

This is not to say that Rockland doesn't have its share of the problems facing other institutions. There is a deep sense here, as elsewhere, that traditional methods and approaches to the teaching of Freshman English may not be adequate to serve a modern student's needs. Even in the classrooms of the most creative teachers, there are failures—students who somehow emerge after an entire term still unable to write sentences or build paragraphs. However, in spite of the inevitable washouts, and perhaps due in good measure to the interest and enthusiasm of the creative writers on the teaching staff, most Rockland students enter their sophomore courses with sufficient writing skill to do assigned writing tasks—no mean achievement in a college with nonrestrictive admissions policies.

**TRAINING COMPOSITION TEACHERS BY MEANS OF A DEMONSTRATION CLASS**

_John Stark_

The success of a Freshman Composition program, particularly one taught by graduate students, depends to a large extent on the training received by new staff members. At Kent State a teacher's manual and informal discussion provided some of this training, but a class in Teaching College English provided most of it. An amorphous course like this one can be taught in many ways. I chose, with some apparent success, to have the students observe me teach a section of our regular Freshman Composition course.

Lacking a classroom with a one-way mirror, I was forced to use the Freshman Composition course in a lecture room. Looking up from the lectern, I saw a few freshmen clustered together in the front of the room, seated in chairs bolted to the floor. Next came a few empty rows of seats, then, at the back, forty-five graduate students. Luckily, the room's two doors made it possible for the two kinds of students to enter separately. Nevertheless, this is a hostile teaching environment, particularly in light of the peculiar class going on in it.
One can, however, overcome this problem.

Oddly enough, the freshmen, their resilience greater than some teachers think, did not mind the room or the observers behind them. The first day, I explained to them who the strangers were. However, one of the freshmen, who did not come to the first meeting, waited about seven weeks before he asked me, with great solemnity, about the people in the back of the room. A vivid sign of their obliviousness occurred about three weeks into the quarter. One of my jokes appealed not at all to the freshmen but elicited some laughter from the graduate students. Suddenly, a freshman’s head snapped around as he reacted with great surprise to the noise. Whether they forgot about the watchers or simply did not care about them, the freshmen entered with no apparent reticence into the discussions and even did exercises on the board without becoming nervous. Their impressive performance may in fact have been partly a response to the pressure of the situation. In any case, freshmen will not necessarily become passive and silent in such a class.

The graduate students, as they revealed in course evaluations, appreciated this teaching method. At the beginning of the quarter I suggested that the new graduate students get a day behind my class so that they could watch me teach everything before they taught it. The experienced teachers probably derived fewer benefits but seemed to find the demonstration class somewhat valuable. Both kinds of students, however, took an active part in the meetings that followed the freshman class. The talk usually began with things that happened during the class that they had just watched; then they often turned to more general pedagogical matters. I found that for the graduate students the mistakes I made with the freshmen were at least as valuable as my successes, so the usefulness of this method does not fully depend on the teacher’s ability to handle a freshman class. His openness to scrutiny and his ability to discuss pedagogical problems are at least as important as his teaching ability.

Whether the freshmen are taught well or not, the graduate students receive several benefits that they would not receive from other methods of training. This method dramatizes teaching techniques that perhaps would otherwise be merely inert information gained from books or discussion. Also, the graduate students, by attending someone else’s class throughout a term, can consider a point that it usually takes a teacher by himself a long time to realize: that courses must develop. That is, they see that courses must be coherently organized and that students must be made aware of this organization, at least in a rudimentary way. Finally — and this is extremely important — they can observe the persons of another teacher. Many of the graduate students seemed not to realize that teachers have personalities in the classroom, that they are not merely “themselves.” Seeing my persons, the graduate students were able more thoughtfully to speculate on the personality that they were presenting to their students, and on the ones that they could be presenting.

Besides the direct help that this method gave our teachers, it also offered other benefits to our Freshman Composition program. The seriousness of teaching Freshman Composition became a common assumption. In fact, the possibility of teaching Freshman Composition — rather than Freshman Miniature Graduate Seminars, Freshman Politics and Freshman Group Therapy — became a common assumption. The morale of the staff also improved considerably. They developed a sense of unity of purpose, including, rather than excluding, their Director. My merely teaching Freshman Composition would have helped their morale, since only one other full-time faculty member taught a regular freshman course that quarter, and since a recent study indicates that not even half of the Directors of Freshman Composition in the country teach the course they direct. Teaching a demonstration class magnifies the effectiveness of this willingness to teach freshmen.

I would offer one warning to Directors who contemplate using this method of training teachers. My bag of teaching tricks turned out not to be bottomless. After about seven weeks the graduate students had seen most of the things that I had to show them about teaching the course. At that point they voted that we make attendance at the freshman course optional and that we use the time after that class to discuss general matters related to the profession. Some of the graduate students continued to attend my class and occasionally wanted to talk about it. Otherwise, we discussed topics like job-hunting, publishing, teaching other English courses, and the philosophy of teaching composition.

I would definitely teach this course the same way again. The few disadvantages — placing myself and some freshmen in a mildly difficult situation — are minimal and are far outweighed by the advantages.

---

WRITING ABOUT WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

John R. Clark
University of South Florida


(All of these books are available in paperbound editions, and all sell for between $3.40 and $3.95.)

Nothing succeeds like success, as the adage currieth it. And, “Writing About Literature” manuals in the last decade have achieved the via trite and commenced to multiply, just as “Introduction to Literature” surveys had before them. Bernard Cohen’s textbook in this newer vein first appeared in 1963, shortly followed in ’64 by Edgar V. Roberts’. Now, as we round squarely into the Seventies, five texts in this kind are fully packaged and waiting. Thus a fad hath been initiated, and the cacoethes scribendi properly stimulated; doubtless more such volumes will shortly emerge.

Nor should I be mistaken. I do not mean to suggest that the recent flurry of activity in this genre is superfluity, so much of pretended caviar and authentic blague. Heaven knows, there is genuine need for Introductory Handbooks which aspire to train the college initiates to read and to write. What better area of expertise for the English professor than approaches to lit? The Outside World (q.v.: Reality) may not know, quite, what we are about. Our business has to do with Literature. Admittedly, over the decades we have been seasonally lured away from Letters to Marxism, to Linguistics, to Psychology, or to purest Bull Sessioning and T-groping.
Nonetheless, we regularly teeter or totter back again to Lit. We are trained, au fond, in Literature if we are trained at all, and when we take it upon ourselves to dally in college with teaching a primary composition that students should have mastered in secondary school, it is easiest and most natural for us to utilize literature as a means to do it. After all, the “concrete instance” is precisely one of the central tenets we want to convey, and it is commonplace to observe that students learn most about Writing — by Reading. Nothing could be worse, in the freshman course, than to set up our class as if it were a Contentless Grammar Stool. Long experience has convinced me that a substantial relationship can be established between the reading and the writing of short literary pieces. And literature can most readily be employed to introduce to the student the few features of sophistication that he will be apt to grasp. Simply stated, this means that the student can learn by mimicry: tasteful reading does induce some spark of tasteful writing. Taste can be acquired.

For such reasons, I have come to presume that handbooks of instruction upon Writing About Literature will prove helpful in the extreme. I similarly infer that such textbooks are most advantageous when they proffer the greatest number of exempla and models. Therefore, the most useful text of this kind remains Edgar V. Roberts’ new edition of Writing Themes About Literature, which offers twenty specific samples of student-like themes on a broad variety of handles for grasping the literary work (the summary, character analysis, setting, imagery, ideas, etc.) Each chapter in his book presents specific (if a bit too wordy) advice upon a particular approach to a work and its analysis, concluding with a sample theme. His book has been updated, moreover (there were 15 model essays in the first edition, 17 in the second), and includes a new section on film. (A Teacher’s Manual is available.)

At the opposite extreme is Bernard Cohen’s Writing About Literature. Although it includes eight specimen essays and many sample paragraphs and portions of themes (together with an Appendix by Leo Braudy on Film), it continues to remain distant from Roberts’ text, for it stresses a fairly ab\text{-}tract approach to Discussions about Literature that moves toward the generalized philosophical treatment, say, in Daiches’ Critical Approaches to Literature. Edward J. Gordon’s book is less abstract and technical yet it contains but three exemplary themes (and no discussion of film).

Sylvan Barnet does provide, in his work, some fifteen sample essays, most of them by professional scholars, and he does reveal some of the expertise in defining genres and terms that we encountered in his A Dictionary of Literary, Dramatic, and Cinematic Terms (2nd ed., 1971), but his treatment does not lead us into the manifold specific areas of literary analysis that the Roberts book provides. In general, then, Edgar V. Roberts’ volume remains superior to most books in the field, and certainly is better for classroom use than Cohen, his nearest competitor.

Still, we must pause over the weaknesses in the Roberts volume, if we are to be thorough or wholly honest. In an Appendix to his Second Edition, Roberts had included a collection of key stories, poems, and passages analyzed in the book’s essays. Lamentably, the Third Edition eliminates this collection. Hence it will prove difficult for students using the latest edition of Roberts to gain access to many of the works analyzed in his samples. To my mind, this constitutes a serious flaw; first and foremost, students are to be encouraged to read Works, not Works upon Works.

In addition, Roberts does not enough emphasize aspects and salient features of theme construction, and he does not attempt (as Barnet does) to introduce students more broadly to major literary forms. Gordon, despite the absence of sample themes, does begin to suggest the many complex features of a multi-faceted work of art that Roberts never fully supplies.

Perhaps Roberts can learn much from one of the newer texts in the field, the one developed by Cockelresses and Logan. Although their prose is at times stilted and verbose, these authors come close to amending some of the difficulties encountered in Roberts. For they proffer a considerable variety of exemplary essays (27 of them), on many aspects of a literary work (atmosphere, symbol, archetype, point of view, tone, style, etc.), yet predominantly with a concentration of essays on a strikingly few selected literary works: five essays on Walker Gibson’s “Billiards,” four essays on Shakespeare’s Sonnet CXLI, four on Sylvia Plath’s “The Rival,” six on Joyce’s “Aranby,” and five on Ionesco’s “The Leader.” All these literary works, of course, are reprinted in the text.

Ultimately, I do not believe that an About-Literature text should be made to serve as “the” textbook in a writing-and-literature course; such a text is distinctly supplementary, and should serve the student as bible, reference, and guide, opening the way to his engagement with other works of art. Therefore, what is needed in this field is a text with sample works and sample analyses, with a bit more variety than Cockelresses and Logan provide, but with the specificity of analysis that Roberts makes available. Such a text should certainly include, in a separate section, the works being treated, interpreted and discussed. The door would thereafter be left open for the instructor to select an additional literature text, one that contains a host of literary works themselves. Both the Roberts and the Cockelresses/Logan volumes appear to me to prepare the way for such a text, and future texts might well begin-by modelling themselves upon these books.

Manifestly, such literature texts should not merely supply partially-effective student essays; there should be a progress of samples available, from student writing, upwards to more professional and superior writing. There is absolutely no reason why an introductory text should talk down to students throughout; the example of a high quality of literary and intellectual expression, as evidenced, for instance, in the introductory essays in that landmark of anthologies, World Masterpieces (ed. Maynard Mack et al.), should be emulated and, hopefully, attained. The mark to be aimed at is fluent and highly sensitive analysis and intellectual expression; these Writing-About-Literature texts should remember that it is toward that goal that their collections should aspire.

I suppose it is to be taken as a type of irony that many of these handbooks move increasingly toward a goal partially fostered in ye olde Brooks & Warren versions of Understanding Poetry (1938) and Understanding Fiction (1943). We imagine ourselves to have long ago “dispensed” with New Criticism’s contributions to literary comprehension, cultured discourse, and specific explication. Yet excellence, of whatever sort, should not be expected to waver, topple, and ultimately fall in every decade’s newest tides and prevailing wind. Recent handbooks instructing students in the visual and verbal appreciation of literature might do well to recognize that they are assembling yet again, re-collecting, an art that much of this Alexandrian century has been disposed, at its best, to cultivate and apply.

SUBSCRIPTION
BLANK ON PAGE 15
Book Reviews


I have a recurring nightmare in which I discover that almost every major publishing house has published a composition handbook, and instead of seeing sheep jumping over fences, I see handbooks: the Heath Handbook, the Harbrace Handbook, the Holt Handbook, the Norton Handbook, the Wadsworth Handbook, the Scott Foresman Handbook, the Oxford Handbook, the Macmillan Handbook, the Prentice-Hall Handbook, the Lippincott Handbook, the McGraw-Hill Handbook, the Little, Brown Handbook...

Now to add to my "perplexity," along comes another handbook, *The Random House Handbook*, by Frederick Crews. One reason for my perplexity is that I'm not quite certain what a handbook is, or at least I'm not quite certain what the term means when used in so many different contexts.

Because the term *handbook*, like the term *rhetoric*, has been defined and used in so many different ways, it is almost impossible to make valid comparisons among books which purport to be handbooks but which may actually be rhetoric books, composition books, composition-handbooks, guides, and indices.

I contend that we cannot take books such as Corbett's *The Little English Handbook*, Hodges and Whitten's *Harbrace College Handbook*, Eldredge and Bracher's *Heath's College Handbook of Composition*, Perrin and Ebbits's *Writer's Guide and Index to English*, Gorrell and Laird's *Modern English Handbook*, and William Irmscher's *The Holt Guide to English* and deal with them in the same way. *The Little English Handbook* and the *Harbrace College Handbook* are in the strict sense of the word just that: handbooks, reference books. They are designed, in Corbett's words, "to serve as a guide on basic matters of grammar, style, paragraphing, punctuation, and mechanics for those engaged in writing public prose." They are not intended to cover "the larger or more subtle problems in writing prose." For these matters, the more comprehensive composition and rhetoric textbooks, such as *Writing with a Purpose, Words and Ideas, Modern English Handbook*, and *The Holt Guide to English*, are available.

(A colleague of mine, a former Director of Freshman English, tells me that years ago he had the most difficult time in trying to get members of the Freshman English Committee to look closely at Gorrell and Laird's *Modern English Handbook* because of the word *handbook* in the title.) Somewhere in between, in a kind of Twilight Zone, are books such as Heath's *College Handbook*, Perrin and Ebbits's *Writer's Guide and Index to English*, and Crews' *The Random House Handbook*. These books combine aspects of the rhetoric text and of the conventional handbook.

Since Professor Crews' book is in direct competition with both the rhetoric texts and the handbooks, it must be evaluated from both points of view. Since the book is divided into two main parts, let me take up each part in turn.

As a rhetoric text, the book fails to meet the standards of books such as Gorrell and Laird's *Modern English Handbook*, William Irmscher's *The Holt Guide to English*, McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose*, or Guth's *Words and Ideas* (not that it does not have excellences of its own, which I will point out later). For one thing, it is much too prescriptive. In at least four of the six or seven chapters dealing with matters of composition, the student is given a series of prescriptive statements intended to teach principles of writing. For example, in Chapter 3 ("Being Reasonable") the student is admonished: "Put your evidence where it counts; Be skeptical about facts and figures; Don't allude to further proofs that aren't forthcoming; Quote and summarize succinctly and accurately; Anticipate objections; Don't slip from may to is; Observe the difference between analogies and proofs; Don't sneer; Don't emphasize your candor," and so forth. In Chapter 4 ("Words"), similar prescriptions are offered: "Make use of your dictionary; Suit your words to the occasion — and to yourself; Avoid euphemisms; Avoid cliches; Avoid jargon; Don't strain the function of words; Avoid circumlocutions; Avoid vague and insincere intensifiers," and so on. Most of these prescriptions are accompanied by a brief explanatory note and an example or two. But can a student really learn to write better by following these prescriptions? This is handbook stuff, in my opinion.

Not only are there too many prescriptions (I have no quarrel with prescriptive approaches provided that they are based on more recent descriptions, as in the manner of much of Francis Christensen's work), but in many instances, the kind of rhetorical advice given is based on outdated rhetorical concepts. (This criticism could be made about many composition texts and handbooks of this sort.) For example, the discussion of modes of discourse is based on the traditional concepts of description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. (Great shades of Alexander Bain!) Yet some interesting work has been done with the forms of discourse by Leo Rockas (Mothers of Rhetoric), James Moffett (the spectrum of discourse), and James Kinneavy (A Theory of Discourse). To take another example, the discussion of coordination and subordination ("Subordinate to show which is the main statement; Coordinate to show that ideas belong together"), while not absolutely wrong, misses the point made by James Sledl that the "traditional theory of clauses is simply untenable."

There are also serious omissions. There is little that is new about composing or inventing, despite the excellent work of Corbett, Young, and Larson. There is a neglect of new approaches to form on the sentence level, the paragraph level, and beyond, despite the attention given to form by Christensen, Rodgers, Becker, Winterowd, and Zeillg Harris. It is not that I think that every book ought to be new or fashionable. Much of the traditional advice given by Professor Crews is excellent and useful. But one might expect at least a few innovations if a new text, in an already crowded market, is to justify itself.

As a handbook, the text has considerable strengths. The Usage Index is more comprehensive than most. The opinions it summarizes are from the most reliable sources. The sections on punctuation, spelling, using the library, and documentation are all competently handled.

Assuming that there are many teachers who feel that this kind of book (the composition-handbook, guidebook, index, etc.) is valuable (and I must admit my own prejudices about books of this sort), what has Professor Crews accomplished? He has written a good, solid, traditional composition handbook. Professor Crews has some sensible things to say about the essay, about what it is and what it does. The chapters on composing, on being reasonable, and on problems of usage offer good advice to the novice writer. The examples he uses to support key ideas are effective and illuminating. The handbook section compares favorably with other handbooks. And most importantly, the book is well written. The prose is clear and analytical ("An essay can be defined as a fairly brief piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way"), informal ("An essay, you tell yourself, has to have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion — and you forget that it's supposed to be interesting"), and witty ("You allot one prominent topic sentence to every paragraph, but the paragraphs..."
instead of moving forward, just stand there like abandoned temples to the god of the essay. Your prose acquires unity, coherence, emphasis — and acid indigestion.) Anybody who writes like this deserves to be read.

Frank J. D'Angelo
Arizona State University


"Contemporary" — the very word recalls a whole generation of texts preoccupied with relevance and revolution now fading from publishers' lists. But this latest rhetoric and composition text to advertise its contemporaneity belongs instead to the wave of old books. For the profession is busy replacing its militant readers and anthologies with rather more traditional rhetorics and handbooks. Innovation and brashness seem not so important these days as other qualities — size, simplicity, familiarity, anything suggestive of substance and authority. A Contemporary Rhetoric looks like such a book.

The reasons for this turnabout in textbook preference are clear enough. Perhaps it was inevitable that we be caught up so actively in the agitation for social change during the 60's and early 70's. However, social criticism is not the immediate object of freshman composition, and texts which urge the student to consider, discuss, and write about current controversies without having anything much to say about either the forms of prose or the attributes of clear and effective expression have proved our undoing. Ten or twelve years of equipping students with an agitprop rhetoric marked chiefly by its if-you-ask-me tone and limited set of subjects and stances has not endeared us to a society that suddenly discovers disinterested minds possessing a prose style suitable for all seasons in short supply.

So, what Maxine Hairston has done is pour old wine into a new skin. (Which is infinitely better than pouring an old book into a new edition!) Like other recent texts, the book retains something of the notion that contemporary controversy and social change are the principal concerns of freshman composition. Rhetoric continues to be conceived almost wholly in terms of persuasion and argument. Essentially, A Contemporary Rhetoric represents a return to the classically pragmatic attitudes and methods of twenty years ago, or at least a step in that direction, for the something-for-everyone approach precludes any definite philosophy or pedagogy.

The text is diffuse, but it is nowhere really thin. And some would consider a book which deals with such diverse topics as diction and logic, writing about literature, tips on reading exposition, not to mention separate glossaries of usage, grammar, and rhetorical terms, impressively ranging. The author sustains the long book well, and the publishers have, through the use of page headings, marginal notes, and other typographical pointers, designed a text in which size and solidness are never intimidating. For those schools preferring a two-semester text, this would serve admirably.

Coming along when it does, A Contemporary Rhetoric holds considerable appeal as a retrenchment text. For one thing, it is a book on writing in a way that few have been in recent years. A teaching assistant or less experienced, less confident teacher will find the text virtually self-supporting (and self-disciplining in that it moves us away from the rap session approach to teaching writing) without being inhibitably systematic. The first chapter, "A Mini Course on Writing," serves as a kind of 'thesis' for the text and is a remarkably to-the-point consideration of basic composition. The persuasion-argument-logic slant of the middle part of A Contemporary Rhetoric tends to assume that improvement in writing will naturally happen once a student learns to think critically. But the author — evidently an energetic and imaginative teacher of some experience — goes to great lengths to insure that this is a writing text.

The short examples throughout the text are selected to demonstrate specific rhetorical principles and techniques rather than explore contemporary topics and controversies (which can make the most up-to-date text read like an old newspaper). Likewise, the readings in the appendix are well selected: none beyond the student's understanding or interest, representing a balance of the reasonably familiar and never-before-anthologized.

Having become accustomed to flashy, strident texts professing involvement as apparently the sole basis of artificateness, we may at first see A Contemporary Rhetoric as a bland and colorless affair. But herein lies its attractiveness. Maxine Hairston's text represents a combination of the best that we have learned about student writers in recent years with what we have learned from Aristotle and the tradition of memorable prose over the last several centuries.

Otis Winchester
University of Tulsa

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . .

Enclosed is my check for $2.00 (payable to Freshman English News) for a one-year subscription to Freshman English News. Send this form to:

Gary Tate
Dept. of English
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, TX 76129

NAME [Please print]

ADDRESS ____________________________________________________________________________

(Zip)