THE OVER-PRODUCTION OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH

William Koon
Clemson University

My suggestion, that we have over-produced Freshman English, has, of course, absolutely no reference to the quantity or the quality of what we produce. Rather, it refers to the way we produce, to the way we run our classes. My point is that we have shaped our little three-hour course — a course that is supposed to concern the native language of our students and the literature that, we claim, every literate man should be able to enjoy — into an epic production that Hollywood might well envy. And, in the process, we have created among our students the impression that College English is esoteric and not very wonderful stuff, that our language and its uses are anything but natural.

The deluge of teaching techniques is a marked sign of what I am talking about here. We are all familiar with the coffee-room conversation that centers on the topic of how we encourage students with Freshman English; and we all have had notions about how to make adverts interesting, about how to make Milton and Blake relevant, and about how to get students to face themselves, their various crises, and moral clauses. What it boils down to, in most cases, is the swapping off of teaching gimmicks. One instructor gets quick results by turning his course into a sensitivity session; another stimulates his class by playing his guitar and singing "Barbry Allen"; another finds that his class likes to act out short stories; and another teaches punctuation successfully by telling students that commas, semicolons, periods, and question marks are like the road signs "Slow," "Danger — Men Working," "Stop," and "Dangerous Curve Ahead." Some English departments ask instructors to write up their successful techniques for a departmental catalogue. With such a collection at hand, one assumes, the instructor who finds himself in a jam on punctuation day can look under "P," find the business about road signs, and set off for class confident of another fifty minutes of good, clean, educational fun.

When our techniques become notably successful, we write articles. Pedagogical journals overflow with this sort of thing. In fact, one number of College English (December, 1971) included all of the articles cited below. In this issue, one writer tells of improving a particular class by asking the students to discuss the basis of their hostility towards the course and its teacher. After analyzing their comments, he had the class meet in a student's apartment where the hostility waned. Another suggests that we transform Freshman English into a "sex-role course" because the author believes in "teaching experiments in which emotions and life relevance play a central part." Another recommends that the course focus on pop music since "Most material in the humanities can be taught from an effective base, starting with the feelings present in the room and developing out into principles that have been catalogued and text-booked for us." He calls the approach "Bibliotherapy." Others suggest student-designed courses. One man, however, found some minor problems when his class voted unanimously to have no teacher ("no me," he laments), to do no writing, to pass everyone, and to meet on Sunday nights in the girls' dormitory. Things did straighten out somewhat, when after several weeks the class granted him permission to "Come, sit, and listen." A few other suggestions that drifted into print in the same issue are that we play

ombre while reading Pope, that we have students close their eyes while we read scatological poems by Swift, and that we transform Gulliver's Travels into a card game (the article includes instructions). And for those of us who cannot refine our students with the Romantics, there are these suggestions: when teaching "Kubla Khan," wear an oriental gown, try to contact Coleridge's soul, bring in a dancing girl, and read the poem while the students chant verses of Hari Krishna between puffs on their water pipes. And Shelley! Why not stage his funeral with a student as corpse (should be easy to find one), and ask the others to come forward to speak a few words over the body. And how do we get from here to Byron? Have the corpse arise and announce that he is Byron and not Shelley at all. As for more modern things, ask a radical student to run out of the room threatening to jump off the nearest bridge while you read a little Kafka. Text books, of course, follow where we lead. Instead of traditional anthologies and the weary old grammars, we now get complimentary copies (I think some of us still get a free book now and then) of programmed grammars, writing guides that deal in mathematical formulas, revolutionary rhetorics, fem-lib readers, anti-texts, and composition boxes (one is just that: a card board box containing photos, cartoons, poems, advertisements, and "hip fairy tales"). Book companies, I am sure, do not object to the obsolescence we build into our courses.

Now, my point is this: I do not think we should turn up our noses at things that help us teach, but I do think that accepting academic jimmackery as a way of life may be dangerous. And these are my reasons: 1) It is difficult to keep the pace. Once a class gets used to the puppet-show approach, it is likely to demand that sort of approach. Even the best lecture has every chance of abysmal failure when it comes on the heels of the burial of Shelley/Byron. And it is impossible to come up with good, exciting gimmicks every day. When we miss step and do not entertain as well as we did the day before, we leave our students feeling like the six year old who, after watching Sesame Street for three or four years, enters the first grade to find that his teacher is a lady who neither plays the guitar, turns back flips, nor produces animated cartoons of the ABC's. In short, by insisting on gimmickry, we cultivate disappointment. 2) Even good gimmicks rarely work twice because they depend on spontaneity. We have all stumbled across successful techniques in the midst of class. But we have, unfortunately, watched our wonderful and instructive games fall flat as re-runs. Like most of the games and text books I just mentioned, they become obsolete with the first application. 3) Gimmicks imply a certain amount of condescension. Students come to college having been told by every one in range that they are entering the adult world, and they find an English instructor who acts like Captain Kangaroo. The result, for the good student at least, is only disappointment. 4) We create the impression that the learning process is absolutely painless and fun-fraught. And if it should become a bit agonizing, the student, and maybe the instructor, is likely to see the course as a failure. If what we teach is supposed to be relevant to life itself, I do not think we should feel obligated to novocaine every point. 5) I think this is the most serious objection: all this tinkering with the course, all of these somewhat feeble attempts to liven things up, suggests to the student that his instructor has very little confidence in what he teaches.

It seems to me that these are obvious and serious drawbacks...
to the gimmick approach to Freshman English. And what dis-
turbs me, about myself and many of my colleagues, is that we
take up gimmicks in spite of our knowledge of their short-
comings. We go right on "Producing," and I think our
courses and our consciences suffer for it. This situation, I be-
lieve, is symptomatic of at least two of the major problems
in the instruction of Freshman English.

The first of these problems is that we have become much
too sensitive about responses to our course. Without doubt, it
is natural and imperative that we constantly evaluate ourselves,
our teaching techniques, and the results we achieve. But I
want to question here the standards which we apply to these
evaluations; for it seems to me that we have a tendency, at
least a tendency, to see ourselves as creatures of the times.
And by that, I mean that we seem to insist too vigorously that
what we do with, and to, our students have immediate and
highly identifiable results. We want desperately to speak wis-
dom and to see members of the class grasp in awe at our hold
on the verities, to hear them testify on the spot to their just-
discovered admiration of adverbs and iambic pentameter, and
to watch them rush out to read more books on the subjects.
And, of course, most of us maintain the hope that our inspired
students will say something about how dynamic and motivating
our classes are when they fill out teacher evaluation forms for
the administration. I do not wish to imply that we always
have false motives; I simply want to say that we may be ex-
pecting results to come too quickly, whether because of our
sincere desire to help students, because of our vanity, or be-
cause of pressure put on us by administrators. Whatever the
case, our mad chase for immediate results has led us into the
realm of Hollywood. Now, what is the solution for this prob-
lem? What do we do if, as I have suggested, we drop the
Sesame Street approach to Freshman English? Well, here is my
prescription: we send into the classroom instructors who are
stimulated by what they instructor, not magicians and not coun-
selors and certainly not people who beg for approval of every
word they utter, but people who cannot resist telling their tales
to anyone who will listen. Our largest responsibility to stu-
dents is to reveal our belief that what we teach is meaningful —
not to insist that they find it meaningful, not to sugar it so
that it looks like it might be pleasantly meaningful, not to im-
ply that it takes the skill of a side-showman to make it appear
to be meaningful, but to show them that we find it
meaningful.

My noble solution leads to the second problem. I think we
overproduce because we are not quite certain about our own
enthusiasm for our course, because we fear that what we teach
may not be interesting. And since we are determined to jus-
tify ourselves and our profession, we tinsel our subject to be
sure that it gets some kind of response. Now I grant that
some dull English instructors must share the blame, but the
major problem here is that our course, in many of its forms,
could kill the interest of the best students and instructors.
Our objective, we pronounce, is to give students good founda-
tions, to be sure they are ready when we open the final door
to the great mysteries of language and literature. So we ask
people who are excited about certain literary things, people who
have been studying these things seriously for a number of
years, to quit soaring long enough to identify some rhetorical
devices in some dreymess essays, or to teach grammar to students
who either know it already or who have never seen any reason
to learn it, or to discuss meter and metaphor with people who
have never liked a poem or met anyone who did.

Now, if you like my solution: if we want to create enthusi-
asim among our students, we must help the instructor keep his
enthusiasm; and we must stop guarding our great literary
treasures the way some librarians guard their books; we must
quit telling students that they have to be washed in the blood
of rhetoric, grammar, and figurative language before they can
make the great leap into the things that made us become
English teachers to begin with. We must put good people in
front of the class and give them room to work, room to in-
dulge their genuine interests, room to reveal what we trust
will be their contagious enthusiasm for the language.

And I think there are practical ways of pointing our course
in this direction. The first thing we can do to take the lid off
Freshman English is to quit seeing ourselves as martyrs to the
cause of the science department. I do not think we should
tell our students that we are going to teach them to write so
that they can write good lab reports. Rather, I think we should
teach writing as a means of testing thoughts, as a means of
solidifying ideas so that we can check them and clarify them
for ourselves and for others. And, maybe, the good lab report
will follow as a by-product.

Another thing we can do, that we must do, is to shift gears on
the structure of some of our courses. Text books, I believe,
will illustrate my point. Instead of giving the instructor a huge
grammar book and a little reader, give him one of these tre-
mendous anthologies of short fiction, a book in which he can
find some of the things that first caught his eye, and a little
practical grammar text. Then maybe he can give his students
some ideas to write about and some reason to write about
them. And when he slows things to correct some grammatical
problems, his comments will be worthwhile because they have
real and immediate applications. He may even be able to
show students that mechanical errors interfere with what they
are trying to say and that wordy and awkward writing may
have something to do with bad thinking. Instead of giving
him the big rhetoric that is more explanation than application,
give him one of these huge collections of essays and a little
guide to rhetoric and let him identify the rhetorical devices
in their place, as means to ends. Then we will not have any
more silly exam topics like "Write a Process Analysis on How
to Gift Wrap an Elephant or on the Care and Feeding of a
Grinch," the kind of topic that I see every semester and the
kind of topic that tells a student that he must jump through the
rhetorical hoop and that he need not have anything to say.
Instead of giving the instructors an introduction to literature
book that is seventy-five percent introductory and twenty-five
percent literature, give him twelve hundred pages of poetry or
one of these fat anthologies of varied genres and a little
glossary of literary terms. Then the instructor can do the in-
roducing; then, instead of reading an essay on how to get
excited about a poem, the student can watch someone get
excited about one; then he can learn about similes and meta-
phors as they occur in works that interest him, not by mem-
orizing the difference between "My love is like a red red rose"
and "My love is a red red rose."

My conclusion is that we will stop over-producing Freshman
English when we truly feel that what we teach is worth the
trouble. And since all of us have found the study of language
meaningful at one time or another, the goal should be within
easy reach. All we need to do, I believe, is to quit avoiding
the things that fascinate us: we need to open the end of the
course and give students and instructors room to find their
interests. Then we can have confidence in what we teach. Then
we will not have to look out into the class after every word to
search for an approving glance or giggle; then we can lead
without worrying about being followed, without worrying
about evaluations or on-the-spot results. Then we can show our
students how grammar and rhetoric and figurative language
really work. An then we can get out of show business and
back to the natural and honest professing of the language.
FOOTNOTES
2 Sara Winter, “The Unalienated Teacher,” 269.
3 Gary Margolis, “Taking it All Off: Teaching in the Therapeutic Classroom,” 278.
6 Leo Hamalian and J. V. Hatch, “How to Turn the Hip Generation on to Shelley and Keats,” 324-332.

MLA SEMINAR
A seminar on Freshman English will be conducted by William Luz, Rutgers University — Camden, during the MLA meeting in New York next December. The seminar topic will be the impact of open admission programs on traditional Freshman English courses. Panel members for the meeting will be Robert B. Lyons, Queens College, and L. Patrick Hartwell, University of Michigan — Flint.

WHO GETS THE KIDNEY MACHINE?
Thomas Friedmann
Brooklyn College

My goals in a remedial composition course are no different from my goals in a regular course. I want to help inexperienced writers learn to formulate an idea precisely and develop, explain, and defend that idea fully. While the form of essay I discuss comes by way of Sheridan Baker, the terminology is Kenneth A. Bruffee’s. He describes his purpose as teaching people “to take a position (the ‘proposition’), and defend it (the ‘defense’).”

The process has to begin with getting students to formulate meaningful generalizations. The problem is getting students to generate ideas, much less getting them to formulate propositions. Add the special problems of a remedial course: students with special problems, convinced of their own inadequacy; instructors new to the field, trying too hard to be encouraging and sympathetic, and the first day becomes all important. If things don’t get started right, they might never get started.

Some colleagues have developed various methods for coping with the problems of the first day in these remedial courses. One popular first day activity has been the “rap session” where students discuss both their fear of writing and their previous experiences in writing classes. Helpful as these sessions are, they encourage students to talk more than write. A more effective way to “prime the pump” is getting students to write as soon as possible. Bruffee suggests a number of exercises which ask students to begin writing by writing. My only complaint against “Reminiscence,” “Brainstorming” and the other beginning exercises he suggests is that they take too long to get to the most important part of beginning — the formulation of a statement that takes a position. My opening day strategy thus consists not only of getting students started, but in getting them started in formulating “propositions.”

After the briefest of introductions — class, office hours, factual information about the course — I hand out a sheet with the following information:

1. John Williams — 28 years old — professional basketball star and TV personality — last year’s MVP — 250,000 dollar salary — married — 26 year old, attractive wife — 4 children — John Williams is black.
2. Archibald McFarland III — 70 years old — former statesman and diplomat — awarded Nobel Peace Prize — former UN representative, Secretary of State and Governor — many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Archibald McFarland is WASP.
3. Rachel Goldberg — 26 years old — free lance writer of some renown — married — mother of 3 children — husband is a paraplegic from birth with a degree in chemistry who has been earning 20,000 per year as a research scientist. Rachel Goldberg is Jewish.
4. Gloria Jones — 4 years old — was able to walk and talk at an unusually early age — only child of physician parents — white.
5. Jose Rodriguez — 24 years old — high school dropout who enlisted — sent to Viet Nam — seriously wounded — developed heroin addiction while in army — kicked habit — has returned to school, received diploma and won a scholarship to college — 18 year old younger brother lives with him. Jose Rodriguez is Hispanic.

A question appears at the bottom of the page.

“Who should be allowed to use the kidney machine?”

Before dealing with the question, we discuss the biographical information. The objective is to not evaluate but to understand. Abbreviations (MVP, UN, WASP) are defined, along with unfamiliar names (Nobel) and terminology (paraplegic). When I am sure that all the information on the page is clear, I am ready to pose the question.

I inform the class that they are faced with an unfortunate but real situation. There is a scarcity of kidney machines and very often, men and women must choose among a number of people one to whom the machine will be made available. I ask them to try to make such a decision.

Very often there are many objections from students. Some say they have to think about it. Others (a surprising number) say they do not want to “play God.” I assure the former group that our decision will not be hasty and the latter that they are to concentrate on the one they are saving, not the ones they are condemning.

It should be clear that the individual teacher might choose another, less “lethal” question to pose. The primary purpose, after all, is to get students to take positions. In fact, the objection itself should be turned to advantage. After all, the objections students have taken the initial step toward successful writing — they have taken a position, expressed an opinion, stated a proposition. In any case, if this particular scenario develops, the teacher has, in a sense, been successful in “getting things started,” without resorting to either irrelevant “rap sessions” or over-long preliminary exercises.

As students begin to formulate their opinions, I ask them to write them down and I follow suit on the blackboard. It is extremely important now to make sure students do not do more than state opinions. The tendency for most will be to say, “I choose X to use the machine,” then continue with “because.” This “because” should, for the moment, be postponed. Ask students to present their opinion but explain that you do not want them to “defend” these opinions — not yet anyway.

When every student has both stated and written down their choice, I explain to them that what they have already done is one half of the basic writing process. They have taken a position (called a “proposition” from then on). I also point out to them that most already know what the second half of the basic argument consists of since most of their sentences included a “because” clause. The “because” is, after all, nothing other than the defense of the position.

What I find exciting about the situation just described is that students make their own discoveries. They see that the written argument they are supposed to learn in this course — proposition and defense — is a process already familiar to them. The key word is, of course, “see.” It is preferable to “tell.” That is what “rap sessions” do, after all. They “tell” students the things that this lesson, through their own writing,
shows them.

The lesson is far from over. While students have become aware of the basic division, they might not be clear about the contents of that second half.

The form of the essay might be diagrammed in the following way:

As the diagram indicates, the proposition is followed by two paragraphs of defense. Keeping in mind that this is not the only form in which to write an essay, I try to get students to use each paragraph to develop one important reason in support of their proposition.

I thus ask them to offer one reason why they feel the particular person they have chosen for the kidney machine merits their consideration. I stress that they should offer one reason and one reason only. When two students offer reasons in support of the same choice, we try to decide whether the reasons being offered are truly two different reasons or whether they are really similar to each other. Each reason goes on the board and into notebooks, and the entire pattern is diagrammed on the blackboard, visually illustrating the separation of proposition and defense. Each student keeps a notebook with "reasons" at the tops of pages and "the proposition" at the bottom of separate pages.

Not only does this form emphasize the separation of proposition and defense, it also prepares the student for other aspects of the essay form. Most obvious is the presence of that empty page. All students know that the page will eventually contain the introduction; few of them are aware, however, that the introduction can be written later. Another advantage of this "loose sheet" essay is that it enables students to change the order in which different reasons are presented. As they become more sophisticated later on in the term in the uses of Nestorian order or the strawman defense, they will find that shifting paragraphs is more strategic. The loose sheets enable them to do this without rewriting the entire essay. If the classroom is organized along collaborative lines, where students work with each other's papers, the loose sheets will come in handy.

For the purposes of opening day strategies, however, the one paragraph per page form has more important benefits. After students have formulated one reason in support of their proposition, there is a discussion. If, for example, someone suggests Gloria Jones for the kidney machine because she is "young," we discuss that argument. The teacher's role might be restricted to demands for articulation and explanation. After the discussion, I ask students to write developing paragraphs, making sure that they do nothing more than explain as fully as they can the one reason they have chosen in defense. This is how a paragraph defines itself for them. By restricting the entire page to the use of just one paragraph, the student is prevented from beginning a second paragraph under the mistaken notion that the same reason is being developed. I tell them to stop writing when they feel they have explained that one reason. There is no other length requirement. Let them leave vast expanses of space. It helps them realize that perhaps more development is needed and that to go on would mean starting a new reason.

When they are done, I collect only the page with the reason. I leave with them their proposition and ask them to write one additional reason at home. The loose sheets, of course, facilitate this assignment. More important, the loose sheets generate the second day's work. When students come to class with that second reason, I ask them to read them out loud. Most of the paragraphs I have gotten lack any kind of transitional phrase but some do have a phrase like "Another reason why Gloria Jones should get the use the kidney machine is . . ." I then return to them their first page and begin a lesson about connective phrases between paragraphs. Because of the division of a paragraph per page, the need for the transitional phrase becomes more obvious and, of course, the division made the separation of pages and hence the overnight assignment possible.

The first day's work ends with a recapitulation of what the class has accomplished. I point out to them that they have essentially written an essay and that the term's work consists of nothing more than perfecting the skills they have displayed on the very first day. At the least, if they can formulate an idea precisely and defend and explain it fully, they have learned the minimum they need for passing the remedial course.

This is not to say that such essentials as grammar and style are ignored. They will be dealt with later. As far as the first day is concerned, however, this lesson has accomplished its purpose. It gets students to begin writing, informs them of the term's goals, builds up their confidence and prepares them for the second day.

Conditions in other schools might vary. There might be more students per class and classes might be shorter than the two-hour sessions we have at Brooklyn College. The lesson would then have to be altered, but its basic approach need not be changed. Its strongest recommendation is its ability to make the
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The ten selections represent a variety of fictional types within the genre of the short novel—allowing the instructor to provide intensive as well as extensive exposure to a number of works throughout the semester.
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TECHNICAL WRITING:
COME ON IN, THE WATER'S FINE

David Pears
Valencia Community College

"My chairman asked me to teach technical writing because he knows I'm handy with tools and fixing things around the house," or "I'm low person in departmental seniority, so I have to teach technical writing next fall." Sound far-fetched, you say? Unfortunately, true. Such statements are being made. Of all the changes forced upon the college English department these days, none is more personally traumatic to the instructors involved than is the rapid proliferation of technical writing courses. As student interest shifts more toward occupational programs, toward degrees that lead directly to jobs, English departments are seeing section after section of rhetoric-literature courses giving way to sections of technical writing. Consequently, instructors are being asked to teach a course they know little about, other than that it is to be feared.

It is to these teachers that this article is addressed, not to define "technical writing" — technical writing instructors argue about the nature of their course as vociferously as do composition teachers — but to examine a few of the commonly held notions about technical writing and to show that it is not really such a strange, ominous creature.

The most commonly expressed reason for not wanting to teach the course is simply, "I don't know how." To many English teachers "technical" implies scientific jargon, mathematical formulae, and esoteric concepts. Letters, reports and the omnipresent memorandum come to mind. This is partly correct. But the business-letter cliche, the double-talk, the gobbledygook, and the tendency toward sesquipedalianism implicit are no more representative of good technical writing than are strained metaphors, obscure allusions and fine-writing representative of well-written literary analyses. In fact, the diction in the typical well-written technical article is probably just as good as that in the average MLA or College English article, and it is certainly preferable to that of most educational journals.

Most of us simply judge by the wrong models. We laugh at Stuart Chase's "Gobbledygook" and sneer as we consider the linguistic garbage turned out by the stereotypical bureaucrat. The point of the matter is, those who composed the abortive attempts at technical communication we so rightfully reject were not taught to write that way in technical writing classes. Just as no self-respecting composition instructor wants to be blamed for the positively disgusting prose turned out by many prominent educators, neither should the instructor of technical writing wish to be blamed for the equally distasteful prose of his former students.

On the contrary, technical writing courses probably stress more heavily than do ordinary composition courses the need to write clearly and concisely, to use "big words" only when they are necessary. After all, the scientist, engineer, or technician must spend much of his time communicating his knowledge to laymen. His writing course shows him how to do this.

Another not quite accurate notion is the belief that technical writing is dull. If one wants it to be dull it will be. But there is probably less reason for this course to be dull than for an ordinary composition course to be that way. If it is true that the quickest way to bore someone is to state the obvious, then restate the obvious, then . . . , the general composition class can accomplish the job much more quickly and efficiently than can its technical counterpart. He may not get sition strip very often, but the dier of the technical writing teacher will be more varied than that of the conventional instructor. He certainly need not fear suffering the plight, expressed so well by the late Paul Roberts in his often anthologized, "How to Say Nothing in 500 Words," of the composition teacher doomed to read theme after theme expressing the same lifeless thoughts in the same bloodless prose. He can read papers, letters, memoranda and reports on a wide range of subjects, representing the major areas of each student. In one day's assignment he might read comparisons of such diverse items as motorcycles (by a student mechanic), air-conditioning units, insurance policies, thirty-eight-caliber revolvers, and heart-lung machines.

Not only are their subjects varied, but students in a technical writing class generally know something about their subjects. No "five-hundred words off the top of my head while I had coffee in the student union" here. This not only leads to more substantive content but leads indirectly to better organization and more attention to stylistics and mechanics. Students can concentrate on how to say it rather than upon what to say. And being interested in and informed about their subject, they are more likely to be genuinely concerned about how well they communicate that subject.

A gross misconception about technical writing is the belief that an instructor cannot evaluate a piece of writing unless he has expert knowledge of the subject. If this were true, we would have to practically discontinue teaching the course. Even those instructors who have worked as technical writers and those with training in areas other than English could not possibly be expert on more than one or two other subject areas. Yet, the typical technical writing class will have students from a wide range of major fields.
Consider, if you will, an industrial executive or a hospital administrator. His expertise has to be in management of people and finance; he cannot possibly understand all of the areas of specialization beneath him in the organizational structure. But he can certainly evaluate the reports of the specialists under him. When he cannot, he loses his job. Editors have the same responsibility.

Certainly one needs some understanding of the content of papers he evaluates, and any competent composition teacher can develop this understanding in fairly short order. A little reading in some introductory texts, a few discussions with instructors in your students' major fields, and a little help from your students themselves, that is all it takes. Once or twice through the course and even the least "technically inclined" instructor will be at home reading "The Post-Operative Care of the Cranioectomy Patient" or "A Comparative Study of Firefighting Equipment in Orange County Fire Districts."

Much of the specific content taught in a typical technical writing class is likewise taught in a typical freshman composition class. Students must be taught to develop ideas logically. After all, engineers have to be logical, and so, for that matter, do firemen, draftsmen, and x-ray technicians. The historian, the psychologist and the linguist need the same ability.

An effective piece of technical communication must be coherent. Not only must the material be logically ordered, but transitional techniques must be used to bind it together. Nothing unique here.

Cause-effect relationships, focus, connotation, ladders of abstraction, in short, nearly all concerns in composition courses are equally prominent in technical composition courses.

No, technical writing and freshman composition are not the same. The technical student needs to learn a few special formats, a few special techniques. But if a composition teacher builds his course around exposition, if he stresses clarity and conciseness, if he is concerned about good, tight organization, if he demands specific details, and if he asks his students to concern themselves with the readers of their work rather than only trying to express themselves; that instructor could easily become an effective technical writing teacher. And he would probably enjoy it.

FRESHMAN COMPOSITION AT HINDS JUNIOR COLLEGE

Nell Ann Pickett
Hinds Junior College

Freshman Composition (English 1113-1123) at Hinds Junior College is a two-semester program required in all technical and academic curriculums. To meet varying student interests and needs, Freshman Composition is offered not as the traditional two-semester sequence but rather as a program of approaches, or choices, from which the student may select the needed or desired approach. In the first semester ten approaches are offered; in the second semester eight are offered.

Approaches offered only in Freshman Composition I

Basic Independent Study
Self-Discovery through Writing
Thematic Writing
Writing about Science Fiction and the Occult
Contemporary Composition

Approaches offered in Freshman Composition I and Freshman Composition II

Business Writing
Technical Writing
Writing about Current Issues
Honors Composition
Independent Study

Approaches offered only in Freshman Composition II

Writing about Literature
Writing about Film and Drama
Creative Writing

All of these approaches emphasize writing, for the Freshman Composition program at Hinds Junior College is a writing program. To assure this emphasis, Freshman Composition has course objectives and units of study that apply to all approaches. Around these objectives and units each approach centers its subject matter and organizes its learning activities.

During the first semester seven units of study are covered: planning the composition, patterns of organization, the formal outline, the paragraph, documentation, the word and the sentence. These units and the accompanying objectives may be taken in any order, redefined in any way, or presented through any subject matter — so long as the units and objectives are covered by the end of the semester. Thus, all students in Freshman Composition I, regardless of the approach, are assured that they will be exposed to the same rhetorical principles and emphases.

The second semester course is similar in organization to the first semester course, except some choice is permitted in the units that will be studied. Five possible units are offered: patterns of organization, literary analysis, imaginative writing, practical communication, and the library research paper. As a minimum requirement each approach must include the unit on the library research paper and any other two units.

As a result of the course objectives and units of study applicable to all approaches, several practical matters are easily handled. A student may choose one approach the first semester and another approach the second semester without fear of being at a disadvantage compared to the student who takes the same approach both semesters. In addition, the recording and transferring of credit is facilitated. The college catalog carries one general description for the first semester program and one general description for the second semester program. Thus, when a student has completed the courses, the student's permanent record simply shows six semester hours credit in English 1113: Freshman Composition I and English 1123: Freshman Composition II.

Other matters, however, have not been solved so easily; specifically, informing students about the multi-approach program, selecting textbooks, and making last-minute faculty schedule adjustments. Since the present Freshman Composition program is only in its second year, other faculty and new students have had difficulty in understanding that emphasis is on writing but that there is a choice in approach to the writing. This problem is being alleviated through making available a printed semester schedule of courses and their respective approaches, providing a written description of each approach, carefully informing the counselors (who register all students), and making classroom announcements before spring registration.

The matter of textbooks has been a problem, giving rise to such questions as: a single textbook for all approaches? one for each approach? individual instructor choice? cost to the student? ordering problems? These questions and others have not been satisfactorily resolved, and consideration is being given to changing the present procedure. Currently this is the practice: Most of the approaches use one core textbook or handbook from the two adopted by the department; however, the more specialized approaches (basic independent study, business writing, and technical writing) use specialized texts. In addition, these core texts may be supplemented by other materials not to exceed a total of fifteen dollars for each student per semester.

Last-minute faculty schedule changes have been another minor problem. In any new program, particularly in an Eng-
lish program involving several thousand students and some thirteen different approaches, it is difficult to estimate how many students will enroll in any given approach. Consequently, an instructor may have developed an approach and be scheduled to teach several sections of it, only to find for any number of reasons that only one or even no sections actually materialize at registration. Meanwhile, other approaches may be overloaded, necessitating last-minute shifting of an instructor from one approach to another. The newly inaugurated pre-registration system, however, seems to be solving this problem.

Whatever the administrative problems — solved or unsolved — the student at Hinds Junior College may choose an approach in Freshman Composition that meets his particular ability or interest.

FRESHMAN WRITING PROGRAMS IN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

Richard C. Gebhardt
Findlay College

In September, 1973, I contacted the freshman writing directors of a sampling of liberal arts colleges scattered through the geographical heart of the United States. My goal, simply, was to find out something of what is happening in freshman writing courses — to uncover information about the contents, instructional approaches, and the academic and administrative conditions surrounding composition teaching in liberal arts colleges.

I wrote to 100 directors in ten contiguous states, using the November, 1972 College Composition and Communication as my source contact. At the time I had set to start compiling data, I had received responses from these 57 colleges: Illinois: Augustana, Elmhurst, Eureka, Greenville, Monmouth, Olson Nazareth;
Indiana: Earlham, Goshen, Grace, Huntington, St. Francis, St. Mary-of-the-Woods;
Iowa: Buena Vista, Central, Coe, Iowa Wesleyan, Luther, Morningside, William Penn;
Kentucky: Brescia, Campbellsville, Kentucky Wesleyan, Thomas More, Transylvania;
Michigan: Albion, Adrian, Calvin, Hillsdale, Hope, Kalamazoo, Mary Grove, Oliver;
Minnesota: Augsburg, Bethel, St. Benedict, Concordia (Morhead), Concordia (St. Paul), Macalester, St. Olaf;
Missouri: Rockhurst, Stephens, William Jewell;
Ohio: Bluffton, Defiance, Findlay, Heidelberg, Kenyon, Mary Manse, Mount Union, Whittenberg;
West Virginia: Alderson-Broadus;
Wisconsin: Alverno, Carroll, Edgewood, Milton, Mount Mary, Viterbo.

The questions I asked the writing directors of these colleges fall roughly into three categories: those concerned with approaches and subject-matter content of writing programs; those dealing with operational or administrative features of writing programs; and those focused on the teaching staffs of writing programs. Most questions called for simple, objective answers, though some asked for more open or detailed responses. And so the report that follows must be a collage of numerical and verbal information.

A. Content and Approach of Freshman Writing Programs (Number of Responses = 57).

1. Which of these areas of subject matter are included? (Note: These items are not necessarily course-wide objectives.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison/Contrast Writing</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Writing Style</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Research Skills</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documented Paper</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Approaches around which programs are centered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Practical&quot; Writing</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Analysis and Criticism</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness Through Writing</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Issues</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiography</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Print Composition (eg. filmmaking)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Paper-A-Day Course</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writing</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Approaches mentioned: Communications + Rhetoric; Communications + "Practical" Writing; Self Awareness Through Writing + Rhetoric + Contemporary Issues)

3. Teaching activities used in the past year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience-Centered Teaching</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Publication of Student Work</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent-Inquiry Teaching</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Teaching</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Teaching</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgraded Assignments</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Behavioral Objectives</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Grading</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory-Awareness Exercises</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Technology</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Use of Objective Tests</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Teaching</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Major innovations in the past year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None At All</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Approach Begun</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman English Requirement Reduced</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial Program Begun</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism and Film Study Added</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing and Reading Labs Begun</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounding Course in Moffett</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Idea</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Course Optional</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Teacher Project Begun</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-emphasizing Traditional Grammar</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass/Fail Grading Begun</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Approach Begun</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deletion of Departmental Final</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of Course into Two Courses</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting Students Select from Two Courses</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Small Groups and Student Assistants</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Organizational or Operational Features of Freshman Writing Programs. N = 57.

- Wide Freedom of Instructors to
  - Mere General Course Goals 48 (84.2%)
  - Common Course-Wide Objectives 44 (77.9%)
  - Detailed Behavioral Objectives 6 (10.5%)
  - General Goals 36 (63.1%)
  - Unspecified by Type 15 (27.7%)
- Requirement that Whole English Staff
  - Teaches Freshman Writing 30 (52.6%)
- Common Textbook Selection
  - for the Course 25 (43.8%)

Texts Mentioned More than Once:
- James McCrimmon, *Writing with a Purpose* (5)
- Common Literature Selection (4)
- Sheridan Baker, *The Practical Stylist* (3)
- Fred Morgan, *Here and Now II* (2)
- Floyd Watkins, *Practical English Handbook* (2)

Freshman Writing Director Separate from English Department Head 17 (29.8%)

Common Grading Standards
- for All Teachers in Program 16 (28.1%)
- A Formal "Philosophy" of Writing 14 (24.6%)
- A Common Course-Wide Syllabus 10 (17.5%)
- A Formal "Philosophy" of Teaching 9 (15.7%)
- Course Wide Final Examinations 5 (9.8%)
- Complete Autonomy for Each Teacher 4 (7.0%)

Freshman Writing Budget Separate from English Department Budget 4 (7.0%)

C. Teaching Staffs of Freshman Writing Programs


- Total Freshman Writing Staff Membership (57 colleges) 346.
  - Men 215
  - Women 131
- Average Size of Freshman Writing Staff Per College 6.07.
  - Men 3.77
  - Women 2.29

- Total English Staff Members (57 colleges) 385.

- English Staff Members Never Teaching Freshman Writing 39 (10.1%)

15. Age of Freshman Writing Staff Members. N = 346.

- 25 or younger 17 (4.9%)
- 26-35 101 (29.2%)
- 36-45 121 (34.9%)
- 46-55 73 (21.1%)
- 56 and older 34 (9.8%)

16. Freshman Writing Staff Members with Doctoral or Other Terminal Degrees. N = 346.

- 182 (52.3%)

17. Average Teaching Experience of Freshman Writing Staff Members.

- 10.2 years of teaching experience

18. Is there a policy or tendency to assign the most freshman writing sections to the least experienced staff members? N = 54.

- No 47 (87.0%)
- Yes 7 (13.0%)

19. Amount of intra-staff cooperation and mutual trust and support. N = 52.

- A Great Deal 42 (80.7%)
- Some 7 (13.4%)
- A Little 3 (5.7%)
- None 0

20. Extent of staff discussion of needs of college students,
research on teaching, current ideas in the teaching of English, etc. N = 55.

Extensive Discussion 14 (25.4%)
Some Discussion 29 (52.7%)
Little Discussion 8 (14.5%)
No Discussion 4 ( 7.2%)

21. Do staff members share a common idea about writing and/or the teaching of writing? N = 55.

Yes 40 (72.7%)
No 12 (21.8%)
Uncertain 3 ( 5.4%)

Some Observations
The colleges in this survey are almost equally divided between those which require freshman writing programs of all freshmen and those which do not (survey item 5). But they vary more widely in the duration of their programs, with about one fifth offering full year programs, one half providing courses one term or one semester long, and another fifth requiring one course of all freshmen but a second course for students needing additional instruction (No. 7). These figures seem to indicate that freshman English at these small colleges is more of a voluntary enterprise than it is nationally. For instance, the 51.8% requiring some freshman English is lower than the 58% found in an extensive ADE/NCTE survey to have required two terms ("Freshman English Requirements," Freshman English News, Fall 1972, p. 10). But the side-notes, attached comments, and other hard-to-quantify hints that writing directors sent along with their surveys suggest that quite a few colleges with fairly systematic ways to test students out of courses or otherwise exempt them from freshman writing do not actually exempt many students.

Average class size in the freshman writing programs of these colleges seems reasonable: about 23, with remedial sections almost always falling between 15 and 20 (No. 8). And these sizes, generally, are about the same as they were three years ago (No. 9). The number of sections being offered this year, however, appears to have declined somewhat, with over 42% of the directors reporting a decline, 37% indicating no change, and only 20% reporting an increase in the number of sections since 1970-1971 (No. 10).

Such a decline, consistent with enrollment pressures facing most small colleges, poses a number of special problems for English departments. Since the vast majority of all English teachers at these colleges teach freshman writing (No. 14), declining need for instruction and instructors reaches out to almost all staff members, probably generating disquieting feelings of dispensability. And at a fiscal rather than a psychological level, the decline is also significant. For as Edward Corbett puts it in a different context, if the demand for freshman English should vanish, "the main raison d'être for the English department's size, power, and lavish (?) budget ... will vanish too" (Review of The Anatomy of College English, Freshman English News, Fall 1973, p. 15). Then, too, the decline in the number of sections obviously complicates the problem of the new job-seeker, though not as much as it would if the colleges surveyed relied more heavily than they do on young teachers to staff freshman English. (No. 15 indicates that only 5% of the freshman writing staff members at these colleges are under 25, and No. 17 indicates that the average staff member has 10 years of teaching experience.)

The teachers on these staffs work so well together that less than one fifth of all the writing directors reported anything less than "a great deal" of staff cooperation, mutual trust, and support (No. 19). Considering that in these departments 90% of all English teachers work in freshman writing (No. 14), this feeling of support is not surprising.-facing together the difficult job of teaching freshman composition would be expected to draw a staff together — by creating common grounds for discussion as well as a clear need for mutual assistance. Surprisingly, though, these teachers who respect and support each other so thoroughly do not discuss student needs, new ideas in English teaching, or current educational research as widely as might be expected. "Extensive" discussion of such matters occurs at just a quarter of the colleges, a percentage only slightly greater than the number of colleges reporting little or no discussion of these subjects vital to effective teaching (No. 20).

Asked about student aptitude, the directors reported little decline, or even an increase, in the verbal abilities of students during the past three years (No. 11). While 55% of the directors indicated that student ability had remained the same, only 18% reported declines and 27% reported increases in verbal ability. SAT verbal scores of high school seniors have been declining nationally through these three years — with last year's 8 point drop to a mean of 445 reflecting a pattern of at least seven years' duration ("Drop in Aptitude-Test Scores Continues for Seventh Year," Chronicle of Higher Education, 17 Dec. 1973, p. 1). And for the past several years specialists in higher education have been describing the changing abilities of college students in terms compatible with this statement by K. Patricia Cross: "A group of young people that we used to dismiss as 'not college material' are now walking through the open doors of colleges, and they constitute a growing proportion of the college population" ("New Students in the New World of Postsecondary Education," National Conference on Higher Education, 13 March 1975). So any evidence of resistance to the trend of declining ability — in this case the perceptions of English teachers rather than test scores — is heartening and probably deserves closer investigation.

Course contents and approaches reported by writing directors appear, to a greater extent than I had anticipated, to be pragmatic, traditional, and more focused on skills than students. 58% of the directors, for instance, said that their programs center around rhetoric, communications, or practical writing, and another 11% focus on literary analysis and criticism (No. 2). And of the "areas of subject matter" included in the writing classes at more than half of the colleges, a majority are practical, skill-centered (e.g. library research, documentation, skills to take essay tests, or such perennial subjects as literary analysis, style study, and comparison-contrast writing (No. 1). Course-wide text selections reveal the same tendencies. Four of the five books selected as common texts at more than one institution are study, familiar handbooks or writing texts, or else common literature selections; and of the other books selected, course-wide, a majority are programmed texts, handbooks, readers, or books focused on usage or style (No. 13).

Further, many of the "common ideals about writing and/or the teaching of writing" reported by directors (No. 21) seem to imply orientations that range little beyond the traditional skills and interests that predominate in responses about text selection, course approach, and the like. The reported "major innovations" include in their number such items as reduced class size, common text selection, dividing one course into two, offering students some choice among courses, deleting a departmental final — a list few people would consider especially innovative. And, of course, 10 directors reported that there had been no major innovations at their colleges in the past year. (No. 4).

Innovation, creativity, and student-focused writing do appear to be concerns of individual teachers — a positive result, perhaps, of the wide freedom teachers of writing enjoy at these colleges. (No. 13 indicates that 84% of the teachers have wide freedom to meet course goals, and that another 7% have "complete autonomy.") For instance, all of the following
subjects are included in sections of freshman writing at these colleges: creative writing, journal keeping, discussions or papers based on current issues, film study or film making, and minority dialects (No. 1). Similarly, individual teachers in the colleges are employing teaching techniques ranging from sensory-awareness exercises, to upgraded assignments, to independent and peer teaching, to class publica, to experience-centered teaching (No. 3). And, though not one program is organized around the writing of autobiography, 68% of all the programs include autobiographical or personal experience writing (No. 2 and No. 1), and 5 programs are centered on the theme of self-awareness through writing (No. 2).

So the content of freshman English appears to be quite mixed, with the "official" weight of course-orientation, text selection, and the like inclined to be more conservative than the approaches of individual teachers. The picture is, perhaps, the one described by textbook editors Tom Gay, Jane Ross, and Richard Welna: it seems to be conservative, traditional, skills-centered in its outward form, though, within, it is more imaginative ("Editors, Textbooks, and Freshman English," *Freshman English Now*, Winter 1973, pp. 1-2.) The parallels are not exact, of course, but there seem to be analogies to Welna's comments about freshman writing texts:

...we're in for a period of neo-traditionalism in Freshman English, and books of traditional form... seem to be making something of a comeback...

Even though the forms of books we publish in the future may be conventional, the content may not be... The whole concept of the writing process is changing: 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.

I think I sense something of this two-pronged trend behind the results of the survey. But with the nation-wide interest in basic skills, vocational education, and behavioral objectives (too often assumed to require small, incremental learning goals), I wish the second -- the innovative, student-focused -- prong were more obvious. For given these interests, freshman English could too easily drift toward the situation Fred Wilhelms describes in "English: Liberal Education or Technical Education": the situation in which themes are graded with such single-minded attention to technique and form that the student comes to believe that "what he has to say and why he cares to say it are of little importance, but whether he says it in correct form is paramount" (*New English, New Imperatives*, ed. Henry Maloney, NCTB, 1971, p. 63).

Probably Wilhelms' great fear -- writing classes that "contribute far more to the rigid and closed personality than to the open and communicative one" -- is only a remote possibility, as long as the instructional approaches of individual teachers are as varied and creative as the survey shows them to be in this sampling of small colleges. But, still, I wish that the innovation and creativity were more obviously central, on a course-wide basis, to freshman writing programs. For small, liberal arts colleges are nothing unless they are vital, vibrant, and very much concerned with the full development of the human beings who are their students. And so freshman writing programs, at such colleges if not at technical schools or institutions that make little pretense of concern for the individual student, must be concerned with "questions about what writing classes are doing to help students become fully developed human beings capable of imagination as well as logic, able to use the flexible possibilities of language as well as the conventions of usage" ("The WLA Newsletter -- An Introduction Starring Ted, Fred, Betty, A Dozen Teachers, and Three Editors," *WLA Newsletter*, Oct. 1973, p. 5).
A face is purposefully carved.
The carving is purposeful.
Similarly, in sentence two:
A character is defined.
The definition is clear.

In both cases, the past participle, a non-finite verb form, presupposes an actor or agent, who remains unidentified. Who carves the face? Who defines its character? The writer, we assume, but he does not here identify himself as he did in the second sentence of the first version.

Other matters of word choice which may be pointed out include the contrast between irregular, jagged at the end of the third sentence and precisely triangular at the end of the fourth. The first is a pair of adjectives; the second, an -ly adverb with adjective. Someone will suggest irregularly jagged as being parallel to the second phrasing, but others will feel that this formal similarity is excessive: if there are two such constructions located so near each other, the rhythm detracts from the sense.

The word triangular here used as a predicative adjective begs comparison with its attributive use in the first paragraph. However, there in the phrase triangle nose and eyes it is the noun form, not the adjective form, which is found. This gives the teacher a chance to point out the strange freedom that writers of English have to alter the function of a word without altering its form.

I ask the difference between the phrases grinning glow in paragraph No. 1 and glowing grin in No. 2. Students feel that grinning glow is the more figurative and the more imaginative: a glow of candlelight illuminates the whole pumpkin, but the cut mouth makes the dominant impression. The second phrase sees only the grin, which being candlelit glows as a disembodied smile.

Another good discussion can surround the question of antecedent for the pronoun it in sentence two. Do personality, pumpkin, or face assume a clearly defined character? Someone always brings up the old rule, that we should go back to the nearest noun, personality. Others argue that the pumpkin has no character before it is cut; the carved face is the only evidence of character. Of course, to assign a pumpkin character in the first place is an anthropomorphic figure which implies human characteristics in a vegetable.

Three changes in punctuation convert these six clauses into three compound sentences:

A purposefully carved face gives the pumpkin personality, and it assumes a clearly defined character. The teeth are irregular, jagged, but the eye-and-nose vents are precisely triangular. A candle stands inside the hollow, and a glowing grin pierces the gathering darkness. Clauses which are only coordinated are also monotonous; information about the sequence of events, about relationships of cause and effect cannot be conveyed without the use of dependent clauses. This brings me to the third version, a six-clause, three-sentence paragraph.

(Since, as)

Because a purposefully carved face gives the pumpkin personality, it takes on a clearly defined character. Although the teeth are irregular and jagged, the eye-and-nose vents are precisely triangular. After a candle lights the hollow, a glowing grin pierces the gathering darkness.

The first subordinating conjunction (since) because suggests cause and effect and is defined as 'for the reason or cause that'; 'on account of the fact that'. As is a broader, more generalized 

degree that'; 'in the same manner that'; 'at the same time that'. Since is a time sj, defined as 'during the period following the time when' and 'continuously from the time when'.

At the second point of multiple choice, the beginning of the third sentence, or, also a time word, suggests 'following the time when'; 'later than'. When indicates 'at the time that'; 'as soon as'; 'once means as soon as'.

This second example involves a sequence of events: the candle must light the hallow interior of the pumpkin before its light can shine forth from the pumpkin’s cut face. The first example, implying a casual relationship between the two clauses, alters the meaning of the sentence. This is felt especially in questioning the pronoun it. Here, unlike the earlier versions, the antecedent is most likely pumpkin.

The Latin verb assumes is replaced by native take with adverb on; while this substitution does not seem to alter the meaning, it does alter the tone. Native monosyllabic words generally convey a simplicity, even a naïveté, not felt with learned and abstract Latinisms. Another verb that could be used here is acquires: subtle differences among these three point up fine shades of meaning and may be illustrated by using them in sentences; such as

He — a new identity.
He — wealth and power.
He — another job.

Irregular, jagged in the second version becomes here irregular and jagged. This is the commoner way of handling two adjectives. Omitting the and in version two caused the two adjectives to “bump,” and this abrupt movement emphasized the further. If version two had employed the and here, the whole sentence would have read... irregular and jagged, but... and the juxtaposition of two and would have been irritating, if not confusing.

Although, defined as 'in spite of the fact that; granting that,' when it heads a subordinate clause, introduces an opposition between it and the independent clause. Here the writer is saying: “Just because the teeth are irregular and jagged, you needn’t expect the eye-and-nose vents to be the same way.” More often, the choice of although calls for a negative in the main clause:

Although (until) a purposefully carved face gives the pumpkin personality, it cannot take on a clearly defined character. The jagged teeth are irregular, although the eye-and-nose vents are precisely triangular. Until (although) candlelight illuminates the hollow, the glowing grin cannot turn the gathering tide of darkness.

Although is causal; until, however, is temporal, meaning ‘up to the time that’, or spatial ‘to the point, degree, or place that’. It is possible to use either sj in the context, but the difference in meaning is great. Students considering this distinction carefully realize that these two cannot be considered interchangeable, as we did the sets of three sj discussed in the third version of the paragraph.

A few variations in word choice appear in this version also. Jagged has changed from the predicative to the attributive position with respect to its noun. The subject plus verb candle lights; becomes the noun, candlelight, and the abstract, Latinate illuminates is supplied to the verb slot. Turn the tide is a familiar metaphor (cliche?) comparing the gathering darkness to the rush of the sea.

One could easily wish for an occasional simple sentence or even a sentence fragment here to break up the series of complex sentences. Each change from simple to compound, from compound to complex has at first seemed an improvement. Then we realize that we have gone too far. The best paragraph
contains a mixture of sentences, and the students enjoy putting together a final revision which combines the various alternatives I have demonstrated.

Thus students are shown the questions the writer asks as he reviews his manuscript. We proceed from uniformity to variety in sentence pattern, from coordination to subordination of clauses. As a secondary issue we look at the standard punctuation, the placement of adjectival detail. Transformational-generative linguistics contributes information about deep and surface structure and about the ability of words to change part of speech. A careful inquiry into synonyms shows that in reality there aren't any; words are never exactly alike and the slight differences command the writer's attention. Going step by step through this process of revision helps the students to see alternative ways, equally "correct," of saying the same thing. Choice among these alternatives is the expression of individual personality and the exercise of style. Students glimpsing the distinction between the acceptable and the attractive set higher standards for themselves, become more critical of what they read, and help me turn the course into a "writers' workshop."

Any demonstration for class room use must also have two other features: it must not be too long if it is to hold the students' attention, and it must phrase a common experience in such a way as to arouse their curiosity.

THE THEMATIC APPROACH TO FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

Gerald J. Schifflhorst
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The persistent need to provide a subject matter for writing in freshman composition courses can usefully be met by implementing a thematic approach. At least that's what we thought at Florida Technological University. A year-long experiment with such a program at FTU, however, produced mixed results.

The purpose of the theme-oriented courses was to provide substantial material for class discussions and to generate topics for the six or more essays assigned during the ten-week quarter. We agreed that students must be prodded to venture opinions, to make themselves clear, and to subject themselves to criticism; to do so, of course, they must have opinions about something. A concentrated study of one idea, we believed, would be of value in satisfying this basic need.

By citing the topic of the course on the registration schedule, instead of merely "Eng. 101: Fresh. Comp.," we also thought that the diversity of offerings would allow the students to choose a theme which they would most like to pursue.

Instructors chose such topics as War and Peace, the South, Sin and Salvation, the Utopian Ideal, Unspoiled Eden, and Violence in America. Most instructors selected paperback readers which emphasized expository essays, along with some fiction and poetry. In addition, a rhetoric-hanbook supplemented the class presentation of exposition, which was to remain the central focus of the course.

Despite University-wide publicity before and after the freshman orientation, there was some confusion among faculty advisors, who mistakenly assumed that composition was no longer the subject being taught. And several of us noticed uncertainty among registrants, one of whom said, "I don't want a course in violence; I thought I was signing up for English." A pervasive difficulty was thus to clarify to both students and advisors what the thematic title implied. The most disconcerting (though least surprising) problems became evident during the terminal evaluation, when the majority of students indicated that they had chosen the course, not for the appeal of its thematic topic, but for the prosaic reasons of time and instructor. Said one: "I had little idea what "Sin and Salvation" would entail, though I enjoyed most of the readings and find religious ideas stimulating. But, frankly, I chose this section because it fits into my schedule." Others observed what some of us had sensed: that the theme discussed, however intriguing to the instructor, had little bearing on developing better writers and that it often seemed irrelevant to the main business of the course.

Moreover, several instructors found that they grew weary of dealing with the same theme in essay after essay, especially after teaching the course for two or more terms. Several suggested that the same problem of introducing literature into composition courses—that of unavoidably teaching literature while trying to teach students to write about it—was evident in our thematic experiment: that is, that the concern with discussing the theme left little time for rhetorical matters. Others saw this as a desirable factor, since the main business of learning to write, they said, occurs only by writing and what happens in the classroom is ancillary to the practice of composition.

Though the department has officially abandoned the thematic approach, some of us use a modified version of our original concept. One professor remains so enthusiastic about Career Planning as a pragmatic and popular theme topic that he has continued to pursue it after three terms, with no sign of boredom and no feeling that the topic interferes with the emphasis on writing. He devotes only about six hours during the quarter to panel discussions on careers; the rest is rhetoric.

Most of the others have turned to other modes, which typically emphasize rhetorical techniques along with a greater variety of readings, but seem glad that they participated in the experiment, if for no other reason than that they learned a good deal about the topic. We seem agreed that, if freshman English is to give students greater confidence in themselves as writers, they must have some competence, first of all, in the subjects they write about and that the concentrated emphasis on one theme can help to provide this type of confidence.

Finally, all of us who tackle the nearly impossible task of teaching basic expository writing must continually be more helpful in seeing that students choose topics which are properly limited so that they feel comfortable with their subjects and sufficiently motivated to have something to communicate. Despite its obvious drawbacks and administrative weaknesses, the thematic approach to freshman composition can be salutary in this crucial part of our educational endeavor.

NEW JOURNAL

A new journal, Teaching English in the Two-Year College, will appear for the first time in the fall of 1974. Published by East Carolina University under the editorship of Ruth G. Fleming and W. Keats Sparrow, the journal will be published three times a year. Subscriptions for individuals will cost $2.00: for institutions and libraries the cost will be $3.00. TETC will publish articles on all facets of teaching in the two-year college. Announcements, book reviews, matters having to do with tenure, rank, and other professional concerns will be included. Two to three page notes and seven to twelve page articles are solicited.

To subscribe, write Teaching English in the Two-Year College, Box 2702, Department of English, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834.
Book Review


It is hard to be dispassionate about prose style, and Richard Lanham's Style: An Anti-Textbook pursues the matter with all the pugnacity it usually invites. As its title suggests, his little volume is a counterstatement to the "Books"; the texts upon whose homely aphorisms and Polonian saws (Be Plain . . . Be Clear . . . To Thine Own Self Be True) we erect Freshman English. It is also a critique of American culture, which Lanham finds dully utilitarian, anti-literate, and pervasively styleless.

Most importantly, however, it is a call for new methods of teaching writing. Fundamental to Lanham's program is a view of style as "a pleasure, a grace, a joy, a delight." Impatient with the moralizing tendency of modern rhetorics and mistrustful of their philosophic and literary premises, Lanham questions traditional distinctions between poetry and prose, honesty and artifice, arguing that the stylistic surface is not only a legitimate object of contemplation but the only proper subject for the composition course, now preoccupied with self-discovery, social activism, or literary pseudo-criticism. Lanham comes down hard on criteria sacred to almost every composition text: Simplicity, Clarity, Consistency, Sincerity. In place of these time-honored rubrics, he advocates a concern for ornament, sensitivity to audience psychology ("Clarity in communication may be less the cause of our pleasure in prose than the result"), a spectrum, rather than hierarchy, of styles, and a pedagogy of imitation, "translation" (i.e. from one style to another), and

There is much in Lanham's pedagogy, of course, that is not "new" at all. In his defense of ornament, his program of stylistic imitation and translation, and in his view of style as pleasure, one discerns the methods and premises of classical rhetoric. We think of all that as a dreary sort of business now, ill-conceived in antiquity and incompatible with modernity, and there is no little irony in the prospect of today's student forsaking self-expression for the imitation of "classic" contemporaries the way his sixteenth-century counterpart regurgitated Virgil or Cicero. But Lanham finds solid support for his program in modern psychological theories and in the work of "New rhetoricians" like I. A. Richards and Kenneth Burke.

Lanham's own style is entertainingly pungent, and his reflections on passages from John Lyly, Dryden, the New English Bible, and Nabokov show him to be a reader upon whom little is lost. Since prose style rarely receives the close analysis we regularly accord poetry, Style would be useful if only to exemplify how the analysis of prose may be intelligently and interestingly done.

Because Style is neither a text nor a tradebook, the literate layman will not find it on his bookstore shelves or the indigent professor receive it gratis from the publisher. And even if the book were to get the audience it deserves, it would probably not get the response it seeks. The current emphasis on vocationalism in education is not likely to welcome an aesthetic approach to prose style, even one so ably defended as this. But Lanham's book should be read by everyone professionally concerned with style. His irreverent critique is a challenge, and a forceful one, to those who continue to fly the old flags.

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