LOOKING BACKWARDS:
ADVANCED COMPOSITION TO
FRESHMAN ENGLISH

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A year or so ago, with my subscription renewal to Freshman
English News, I appended this question for Gary Tate and his
editorial board: “What is advanced composition?” The question
was prompted by a pleasant but profitless wrangle in my own
department over definitions of basic and advanced writing
courses. It was the sort of questioning that English Depart-
ments indulge in periodically. If advanced composition is the
capstone of a college writing program, we wondered, what
does it cap? The prior question appeared immediately: How
does freshman English prepare a student for advanced com-
position? We inferred from our departmental difficulty in draw-
ing a definitive thread from the clotted, variegated tangle
which is freshman English that we might tentatively answer
such questions by looking backwards from the perspective of
advanced composition. Hence the question to Gary.

In response, Gary sent me the results of CCCC workshop 17,
as reported in College Composition and Communication for
October, 1971 (p. 291). There, participants had suggested
that advanced composition should recognize “the full com-
plexity of composition.” Furthermore, it should be demonstrably
distinct from freshman English, “not just more of the same.”
In addition, an advanced course should stress excellence rather
than competence, should include classical rhetoric as one com-
ponent, and should distinguish between various types of ad-
vanced courses, e.g., creative, expository, and business.

I considered these suggestions for some time and then de-
determined to deal practically with each of them in an advanced
composition course in the hope that light might be shed on
both the freshman and advanced components of college writing
courses. I taught the course; it did illuminate certain shady
areas in my own conception of what a college writing program
might be; and I would like now to share the course and my
thoughts about it.

In describing it for student registration, I attempted to meet
the spirit of the CCC panel’s suggestions by dividing the
course into two parts: the first part consisting of a study of
rhetoric, the second consisting of the development of a publish-
able essay. These two requirements, I felt, would satisfy the
panel’s wish for distinctiveness and its ideas about content.

Our earliest class discussions, in fact, dealt directly with
the panel’s suggestions. First, we tried to synthesize student ac-
complishments in freshman English in order to establish a
ground floor on which we could all sit and write together. In
effect, the class set its own starting point by assuming a
competence in mechanics, sentence generation, paragraphing,
and basic patterns of organization.

Next, we tried to define “advanced” and to determine how
we could progress from “competence” to “excellence.” We
 guessed that “excellence” had something to do with “elevation
of style”; but as our efforts at definition were unsuccessful, we
voted to begin being advanced by plunging immediately into
Section Four, “Style,” of Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric for the
Modern Student.

Finally, we spent some time discussing the past history and
present utility of rhetoric. This class enjoyed an historical
perspective and were convinced of rhetoric’s value by Arnoldo
Torres’ report on Wayne Booth’s Modern Dogma and the
Rhetoric of Assent.

In subsequent discussions during those first weeks we re-
turned again and again to one subject — writing assignments.
What kinds of “advanced” assignments would best comple-
ment the stylistic felicities we analyzed and imitated? Much of
the substance of these discussions was diurnal; I could almost
remember making the same points myself as an undergraduate.
The students did not like assignments “laid on” them: “I never
know what the professor wants,” or “I’m just not interested
in what interests him” were typical remarks. On the
other hand, students were unsure about the wisdom of gener-
ating their own assignments: “I don’t know what to write
about” joined with “It’s not my responsibility; you should
know what’s best” to create a traditional kind of confusion.

At this point someone anticipated me by returning to the
problem of subject matter. A high-quality subject seemed
necessarily correlated to high-quality writing. Perhaps this
was what I had in mind when I described as the major purpose
of the course a publishable essay (it was!). The real sub-
ject matter for the course, this student concluded, was the student’s
own subject — a subject-matter generated by him! Unfortu-
nately, the excitement which greeted Linda’s discovery dissipated
immediately when someone else inquired, “What kind of
subject?” — and no one could think of an example.

At any rate, with our second subject area vaguely and
threateningly before us, we advanced our rhetorical skills with
the help of Classical Rhetoric and The Norton Reader. The
class was challenged (and often delighted) by the Corbett
text. They were challenged (and often disgusted) by their
writing assignments: short papers discussing introductions, con-
cclusions, strategies of arrangement. I found that I drew crit-
icism for Corbett’s dryness as well as my own. Even though
the discussion of enthymemes was Corbett’s, I assigned it! Also,
the seemingly endless analyses of introductions, the repeated
imitation of rhetorical schemes and tropes, became something
less than exciting.

Ahead, in the second half of the course, lay the undefined
second subject, but the class seemed unwilling to move toward
it. Their inability to project independently and aggressively
into the future was understandable if unsettling. Most had
never generated their own topics; nearly all disbelieved in their
ability to produce anything publishable. To generate some for-
ward movement we decided to set aside a day each week in the
second quarter of the course to serve as a sort of “think tank”
— our “Thursday-morning sessae.” Two considerations floated
repeatedly to view in our crystal ball.

First, we tried to generate topics, and our fears of the un-
known was mitigated by dealing in class with subjects which
individual students knew a good deal about. One of the first
volunteers, flanked by early Victor talking machines, wax
recording disks, and other phonographic impediments, gave
us a history of the phonograph. David’s expertise startled us
all; so did his evident difficulty in articulating this material.
The class, however, was so impressed with his explanation of
how victrolas worked (he disassembled one in response to a
question), that we suggested that he try a process paper. David
was not entirely convinced by our idea, but he did return to
this subject later, and his article “The Care and Repair of Your
Victrola Motor” is at the moment being considered by Popular
Mechanics.

Our second obvious problem area was the market. Who
would print these mythical articles? How could we find our
"editorial Mr. Right" (as a limpid-eyed coed liked to refer to him). I had said from the outset that marketing their work was their problem; but as mid-term arrived, the class wasn't having any of this. We began in desperation to analyze the market. As one might suspect, from a collective position of sheerest ignorance, any ideas we uncovered gave us an unreasonable feeling of accomplishment. Did you know, for instance, that "at last count there were in this country fifty-six Sunday newspaper magazines?" Or that even the smaller Sunday newspaper magazines print three hundred to five hundred articles of varying lengths each year? Or that "thousands of business magazines and trade journals" in this country welcome contributions and pay for what they accept?

We discovered these facts in The Writer (Jan., Feb., 1975), an incredibly helpful magazine which surveys a part of the market each month, and which offers innumerable practical hints to aspiring writers. We not only discovered the wants and needs of numerous journals here, but also many secrets of the trade — like how best to query an editor.

This whole matter of the market is, of course, a huge area; and one not strictly germane to my subject. But there were several benefits for a writing class in this study. One of the major benefits we derived from our research was an almost tactile sense of an expanded audience. And with this sense, the class began to wean itself from Corbett — and, more importantly, from me. As Robert Bain recently observed, "Of the several advantages of a journalistic approach to freshman writing, the most immediate is the definition of an audience other than the teacher." (FEN, Spring, 1975)

In my view, Bain is entirely correct. During the second half of the course, our progress from a simplistic, student-writer/teacher-critic situation to that of advanced writer addressing a specified audience proceeded with relative smoothness. Corbett's thought-provoking strategy considerations led inevitably to discussions of the writer's role. With assistance from William Innescher, the Tibbetts, and others, our class was led to self-conscious adoption of specific points of view, or roles. This in turn led to a clarification of the audience — me. Once aware of role-options with me as the audience, we took the traditional step that made the class the audience.

Armed with a battery of rhetorical skills, committed to a subject empowered by the class, our writers had to provide a rationale supporting a minimum of three different articles on their chosen subject — and defend it. I found once again that the student critics of the 70's is a harder man by far than his counterpart from the 60's — especially when this critic has Corbett's Rhetoric ready to hand. I found myself transported almost instantly from the role of reader/antagonist to that of helpful resource person, writing coach, friend.

During this last quarter of the course, attendance was not required. All of our efforts went into the finished articles. Yet we continued to meet. As the benefits of good editing became more and more obvious, students asked for more and more opportunities to air their re-writes, to share research tools, and to discuss the market. Class truly became a forum for discussing "writing in all of its complexity."

It is hard to say what we might have accomplished if our spring semester had not ended so quickly. One hundred percent publication in the class? Probably not; but we did receive word of our first acceptance before graduation. Rick, a third-year business student, placed a tightly-organized, well-researched article on the Marin County Court House, Frank Lloyd Wright's last public building. It will appear this fall in the Pacific Historian. And we have half-a-dozen good possibilities at journals like Seventeen, Mademoiselle, and Ms.

In retrospect, it is difficult to see how a course like this one would not work well for most teachers and students. It seems to implement in positive ways all of the useful suggestions of the CCCC panel. Beginning the course with a study of rhetoric was, students felt, of special value. They further endorsed Classical Rhetoric, even though "it sure was hard" (and from what little two students learned might as well have been written in Greek). Corbett's rhetoric, though difficult, was consistently challenging, always informative. Its stress upon strategy decisions, which the writer alone must make, interested generally and fascinated those with a knowledge of game theory. "It's a game you can win," mused one student who had never liked writing.

Surprisingly, the subject matter of the Corbett text was totally new for most students in class. Those who had taken linguistically based freshman English (or experimentally based, or competency based, etc.) had almost no acquaintance with rhetorical concepts or strategies. And even those whose freshman English had been rhetorically based (perhaps less than one-fourth nationally if Richard Gehardt is correct — see FEN, Fall, 1974) were the victims of competing or idiosyncratic terminology which obscured traditional forms and meanings.

Requiring a publishable article seemed forward looking to the students and nicely balanced our look backward into classical rhetoric. They felt that such a requirement called for the highest standards (if it's in print, it's good — is it not?), and publication pressure was obviously a powerful motive force. Publication, in fact, was not required; but submission was: one article in final form cleared by the class editors, tailored for a specific journal. A finely-crafted product aimed at a specific market was our objective in the second half of the course. This requirement alone would have guaranteed the success of the course in student eyes, I believe, because it provided such heady whiffs of fresh air from the "real world" that students are forever invoking against their ivy-covered humanities professors.

This advanced course was successful in that it was discrete, demanding, and seemed to the students to embody a new approach to writing. Reflecting back from it to freshman English there are two obvious ways in which freshman English could have better prepared my students. First, they felt that it would have been helpful if freshman English had introduced them to classical rhetoric — that is, to rhetorical topics and strategies specified as such and conventionally labelled. Looking backward, many felt as if they had been somewhat patronized and led astray in their freshman course in that rhetorical ideas had been sketchily presented under catchy titles and watered down forms. We all felt that an introduction to terms, tropes, and schemes could be implemented whatever the shape and size of the freshman English program. In addition, I believe that the writer's role and the identification of the audience should receive more stress in freshman English than they evidently do now. Unless University of the Pacific students are totally non-representative, it seems that student writers do not consider enough the psychology behind their writing.

The second way in which any freshman English course could help to prepare a student for an advanced writing course would be to include a journalistic unit along the lines suggested by Bain, although in one respect less "platonistic." This unit would contain exercises designed to clarify questions of role and audience, and it would require the student writer to submit a paper either to a specially defined class audience or to the college or local newspaper.

If advanced composition is the capstone in most students' formal writing training, a combination of rhetorical and journalistic approaches such as the one I have outlined is well-suited to satisfactorily conclude the training. It is the kind of course nearly any composition teacher would enjoy along with his class; and, looking backwards to freshman English, it offers one valuable method for insuring coherence in a college writing program.
FROM THE EDITOR:

I was excited to read in the March, 1975 issue of College English that the NCTE Editorial Board had "recently approved publication of a collection of the most popular NCTE journal articles on the teaching of writing in the two-and-four-year colleges, compiled by the editors of College English and College Composition and Communication." The notice went on to say that the book would be inexpensive and that it would probably be published in late spring. Although I was puzzled by the term "popular" — Why not "best"? — I was elated to think how useful such a collection would be to teachers of composition, to directors of writing programs, and especially to instructors in charge of training programs for new TA's.

When July arrived and no further mention of the book had appeared, I called NCTE headquarters to inquire about the status of the project. Paul O'Dea, Director of Publications, told me that the book would appear in late summer or early fall, but that it would contain articles only from College English. He very graciously offered to send me a copy of the table of contents, which he did and which I now have before me as I write this in mid-July. In spite of Mr. O'Dea's cooperation and my desire not to sound churlish, I must say that I think we have all been done a disservice by the Editorial Board or whoever was responsible for deciding to put together the collection of articles that will apparently be published within a few weeks or months. (It will be entitled Idea for English 101.)

In the first place, anyone who teaches composition and rhetoric knows (or should know) that College English publishes each year far fewer articles on these topics than does College Composition and Communication. (And what about the English Journal, Research in the Teaching of English, English Education, and the other NCTE journals?) What appears in CE is often quite good, and many of the articles in the forthcoming book are first-rate: Winterrowd on the "Topics," Coles on "writing as writing," Elbow on "A Method for Teaching Writing," etc. But why could not NCTE have taken the time to gather from all its journals a collection of the best articles on the teaching of writing and rhetoric? And why could not these articles have been organized in a more logical and useful way than the two-part division used in the forthcoming collection, a division into "What Should Freshman English Be? Methods and Controversies" and "Tactics?" (The distinction between "methods" and "tactics" escapes me.) We thus have articles on invention in the same section with an article on teaching composition to "New York Cops" and an article on the use of cassettes in the classroom. Surely the cost of doing a better book would not have been prohibitive. Possibly the editors of the journals were too busy at the time to collaborate on what would have been, I admit, a difficult and time-consuming task. But why the rush into print? Most of us, I am certain, would have been willing to wait a year, two years, for a truly excellent book, a much needed book. Whatever the reasons—and I can think of none that are justifiable—we are now (dues-paying members all) being given less than the best, less than we deserve.

What will we have missed—in a book "on the teaching of writing"—by having only CE articles? Each of us would have his own list of essential pieces, but I cannot conceive of such a book that excludes, for example, Richard Braddock's award-winning essay "The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences in Expository Prose" (from Research in the Teaching of English), the stimulating exchange (about invention) between Janice Lauer and Ann E. Berthoff, and "An Unpety Peace" by William E. Coles, Jr. (all from CCC). I have no space to list all the CCC articles that should be required reading for composition teachers. More curious still are the articles published in CE, the source journal for the entire collection, that are apparently not to be reprinted in the NCTE collection. I will mention only three: Richard Larson's "Discovery through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention," Keith Fort's "Form, Authority, and the Critical Essay," and, finally, the best article on rhetoric to appear in an NCTE publication in recent years: S. M. Halloran's "On the End of Rhetorical: Classical and Modern."

It seems to me that a larger question is raised by all that I have said: "How well are we served by the professional organizations to which we belong?" And further: "What should our attitudes towards these organizations?" Too often, I think, we view NCTE as a new building on Kenyon Road, or as the officials of the organization, or possibly as those "important" people who serve on the various committees. (The same could be said about MLA or CEA or any other such organization.) I must quickly add that I know some of the people at NCTE headquarters and some of the people on the committees. They are hard-working, dedicated professionals. But they alone are not the organization. You—if you pay your dues—are what NCTE is all about. You are a part; I am a part. We are the organization. And that is why we are all obligated to protest when we think, as I do in the present case, that we are being poorly served.

Because of the increasing pressures of work, Lynn Quitman Trotsky has been forced to resign her position as Two-Year College Editor of Freshman English News. Lynn worked for FBN with enthusiasm, imagination, and a seemingly boundless energy. For what she has contributed, the editors say, "Thank you, Lynn. You'll be missed."

FRESHMAN ENGLISH AT MLA

Those interested in composition and rhetoric will find the MLA meeting in San Francisco this December a far more attractive meeting to attend than it has been in years past. William Lutz (Rutgers) has led a small group—to whom we all owe our thanks—in putting together a tempting sequence of meetings. The sequence will begin with a two-hour Forum on Freshman English at which the speakers will be E. Donald Hirsch, Mina Shaughnessy, and Richard Larson. The titles of their papers will be, respectively, "Defining the Goals of the Composition Course," "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," and "If Freshman English Is a Service Course, How Does It Serve?"

Following the Forum will be a series of seven Workshops, scheduled at different times over a two-day period so that a person can attend all of them. The Workshops will deal with a variety of topics: "The Politics and Economics of Freshman English Programs," "Teaching Composition to the Poorly Prepared Student," "Theories and Philosophies of Composition and Composition Programs," "Training the English Teacher in Composition," etc. The Workshops will be led by such panelists as Donald McQuade, Joseph Comprone, Maxine Haiston, Frank D'Angelo, Ross Winterowd, James Ney, Ronald Smith, Richard M. Coe, Francine Steiglitz, Edward P. J. Corbet, and James Raymond.

Detailed information about the MLA Freshman English meetings will be available in the November Program issue of PMLA.
THE BEGINNING OF RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Wilson Currin Snipes
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

The purpose of freshman composition — to enable the student to express himself effectively and engage in rational discourse about his experiences, thoughts, feelings, the things he learns, and such — is partly realized when the student has developed some conscious command of grammar, logic, and rhetoric as essential components of effective expression. In these remarks I propose a conscious, a professional, self-conscious, approach to the teaching of composition. And I propose that directors of freshman English in particular address the problems involved in such an approach, for the focus of contemporary criticism of student inability to write is directed in general to the colleges and universities, not to the secondary schools. In other words, the responsibility for language literacy and illiteracy is assigned by other disciplines in the university and society at large to the departments of English, and especially to those responsible for basic work in composition. Without pausing to debate the issue of responsibility — secondary schools, admissions offices, lazy students, doing your own thing instructors, etc. — for the moment let us accept the premises made by our colleagues in other disciplines, as if they have no responsibility for literacy in composition, without engaging in apologia or polemics. The question we must face, given the host of assumptions and premises society makes, is one of what we should be doing in freshman composition.

II

The views of what happens to a student in freshman English are various as the commentators. At one end are those who think freshman English is a practical course; Professor Albert Kitchaber describes this practical view: “The course exists to provide immediate therapy for students whose academic future is clouded by their inability to manage the written form of English with reasonable ease, precision, and correctness.” At this end of the spectrum we find the view that therapy, short and specific “how-to” guidelines, will provide the student with what he needs to know about language and what he needs to do to pursue his specialty in one of the disciplines.

At the other end we find the liberal view, in Kitchaber’s words, “that the primary purpose of the course is to focus the student’s attention on fundamental principles of clear thinking and the clear and effective written expression of that thinking and to give him disciplined practice in applying the principles.” We find a “skills” concept between the two ends of the spectrum, with grammatical rules and conventions closely allied to the practical and logical, and with rhetorical principles closely allied to the liberal. Most programs I am acquainted with are between the service or practical concept and the “intellectual training” concept; they fuse the compositional component with models of well-written prose, attempting to teach by precept and example each student to acquire both intellectually and through performance the basic habits of thought and expression common to clear and fluent prose, based on a command of the grammatical system, basic logic, rhetorical principles, and careful selection of subject matter. But, as Kitchaber so well states: “The habit of good writing, like the habit of ethical conduct, is of slow growth…”

III

The ungrammatical, illogical, semi-rhetorical compositions, which most of us dutifully read day-in and day-out during the academic year, are the result of sloppy teaching and sloppy learning. In an “age of innovation” and experimentation, when any idea coming down the pipe is immediately described as the experimental basis for a course in composition, we must be the greatest drudges since Sisyphus first pushed a rock (“say the struggle naught availeth”), for we dutifully mark each student composition for grammatical mistakes, misspellings, non-sentences, punctuation errors, the illogical, as well as making comments on the rhetoric while editorializing and affirming the student’s identity as a person; in more positive terms, we praise those compositions which are grammatically, logically, and rhetorically literate, challenge the semi- and illiterate, and work like blazes to teach the meanings and value of rational discourse. One way in which we respond to the needs of the student writers in these oversimplified categories is through advanced placement of the literate, the “regular” composition sequence for the semi-literate, and the developmental courses or writing centers for the illiterate or disadvantaged. Yet we find this curriculum solution unsatisfactory, since many advanced placement students, though in command of grammar and logic, are relatively ignorant of rhetorical principles.

There is no one curriculum, one system, designed to cope with the multiplicity of compositional needs of students. Still, the traditional, basic curriculum of grammar-logic-rhetoric may offer the soundest cumulative effort we can make at this time. I am not proposing a medieval argument in the twentieth century; I am proposing a discipline as the basis for teaching composition, a branch of instruction and learning as well as training to write by rules, conventions, precepts, and concepts. For example, the rules of punctuation, call them conventions and criticize them from now to kingdom come, provide a framework for the intelligent exchange of information, self-expression, argumentation, and so on. Likewise, spelling, the conventions of the subject, is essential — I know, for my handwriting is so atrocious that few people can read a line of script I write. Similarly, the rules governing rhetorical organizations, those which govern logic, and such. Such words as discipline, rules, training, conscious control, even knowledge of something rather than “knowing where to find it,” are not current fad words, given the contemporary psychology and sociology of a non-judgmental society. The fact I have just described does not obtain in the professional training of undergraduates and graduates in the professional curricula of higher education, yet many teachers of composition have assumed or presumed the student psyche is the especial concern of freshman composition. I am suggesting that we limit the curriculum of freshman composition to just that, the grammar, logic, and rhetoric of written discourse, and leave the identity crises to those who specialize in such matters.

No matter what theory we may have concerning the relationship of language to thought, the writer, the composer, must have a way of “wording” and “sentencing” and “paragraphing” what he wants to say. In fact, he may not, and probably does not, know what he wants to say until he says something. He must “language” his thought and “think” his language. Whereas he may gain utility through logic, unity of ideas, he will gain coherence through grammar, through the systems by which he “words” and “sentences” his thoughts. From subject-verb agreement and disagreement to the effective use of transitional devices the writer is seeking to achieve coherence. When a pronoun disagrees with its antecedent, there may be no misunderstanding of meaning and communication, but the coherence is more precise when the antecedent agreement is specific. So too when we consider such matters as tense sequences, modification, conditional expressions, and such. Likewise, when he “words” and “sentences” his thoughts, the syntactical system enables him to follow main lines of thought, subordination of thought, introduce parenthetical expressions and interrupters.

Both knowledge and command of the basic conventions of the grammatical system of the language are prerequisites to a command of the logical and rhetorical systems, for grammar is a basic way of creating coherency. It is not the terminology,
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the descriptive terms from language and linguistics that are
of consequence, although these terms enable us to talk effi-
ciently and more precisely about prose and language, but the
writer's command of sentence sense that offers the basis for
larger logical and rhetorical units of meaning. The study of
grammatical — case, agreement, tense, mood; mechanics, capitals,
italics, manuscript form; punctuation; spelling; diction — is
reflected in the command of the sentence. So too the command
of the sentence reflects the ability to control sentence co-
herence, subordination, parallelism, emphasis, variety. Such
knowledge, to be used, requires "skill"; for example, the writer
must be able to use these sentences in larger organizational and
rhetorical units of discourse. In turn, each organizational unit
requires different tactics of the writer, depending on his focus:
the chronological, cause to effect, enumeration, comparison
and contrast, definition, process, and such. And then each of
these must be used in contexts as variable as the language
situations in which man functions. Behind the entire sequence
— grammatical, logical, rhetorical — of these systems, which
I have presented somewhat mechanistically, is the assumption
that the speaker or writer is a thinking person, exercising
choice, making value judgments, drawing from human experi-
ence the interesting and worthwhile.

The logical elements are reflected by the purpose statement
of a unit of discourse, by the topic sentences and conclusion,
the intellectual framework of the content of the written unit
of discourse. So too the logical framework is represented by
the controlling organizational principle or principles followed
and the specific principles followed in paragraph development.
The intellectual maturity of the writer is shown not only in
the simplicity or complexity of the subject and the purpose
of the unit of discourse, but also in the use of details, au-
thorities, experiences, statistics, facts, and judgment. In tradition-
al composition work the outline has been used as a way of
teaching the student, of disciplining the student, to think
clearly and precisely, to focus on the intellectual quality and
character of his expression. In recent years, with greater empha-
sis on "doing your own thing" and the effective nature of self-
expression, the outline has been used less frequently and the
intellectual quality of written discourse has declined. Obviously
I am suggesting that the writer must have something to say
and a way of saying it; basic logic offers such criteria, or
"skills" if we use the current terminology.

The student must have an elementary knowledge of the
processes of induction and deduction, of a few ways of rea-
soning syllogistically (including the hypothetical syllogism,
the either-or syllogism, the categorical syllogism) — of the
nature of and use of the enthymeme, of eight or ten logical
errors or illogical ways of thinking (such as begging the
question, hasty generalization, post hoc, the straw man, ad
misericordiam, contradictory premises, poisoning the well);
such logical knowledge is not particularly difficult or complex.
But the knowledge is not enough: the student must apply this
knowledge to what he says, to what he writes. His "skill in communication" must begin
with his individual thinking process. Such knowledge and
application of elementary logic enables him to think critically
and to examine analytically his self-expression. I must quickly
add that thought is more than logic, for such logic is based on
some assumptions which I find difficult to accept, given the
nature of language. But it provides a basic instrument for
creative as well as critical and analytical thinking. To begin,
then, the student or writer must have something to say and
a way of saying it, a logic of sorts as a way of saying some-
thing.

Rhetorical control is yet another matter. The writer who has
logical and grammatical understanding of what he wants to
say must also anticipate the effect of what he says on an audi-
ence. Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the faculty (power)
of discovering in the particular case what are the available
means of persuasion." I do not wish to limit the term to
persuasive discourse only, for I believe the aims of discourse
are as various as the human beings using language: associating,
narrating, describing, moving, telling, showing, defining, in-
forming, explaining, and on and on. Rhetoric is that part of discourse
which is audience oriented whether the writer has
himself, a single individual, or a group, proximate and/or
remote, as his audience. The writer controls what he says in
relationship to his audience and the effect he wishes and
anticipates.

In these remarks I have not asked for a return to the "halcyon
days of yore," those of thirty or six hundred years ago. I have
suggested that the curriculum in freshman composition offers
a proper body of knowledge and convention which students
should understand and control as the basis for effective self-
expression and rational discourse. This curriculum is properly
devoted to matters grammatical, logical, and rhetorical. I pro-
pose that once again those responsible for the teaching of
composition accept the task of teaching, training, disciplining
the students to compose, for the resulting literacy is a re-
spectable goal for freshman composition.

NOTES

1 "Too Many A's," Time (November 11, 1974), p. 106; see
David B. Truman, "The Necessity of High Literacy," The
Chronicle of Higher Education (December 2, 1974), p. 24; also
Professor Mike Shugue's description of the problem as that of
introducing "growing numbers of young adults to literacy —
to reading, writing, and even to speaking," as quoted in
"Crisis in English Writing," The Chronicle of Higher Educa-
2 See Albert Kittabeger, Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The
Teaching of Writing in College (New York: McGraw-Hill
3 Aristotle, The Rhetoric of Aristotle, translated by Lane
Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1932),
p. 7.

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essay on freshman composition, rhetoric, or closely related subjects.
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I LIKE THESE

W. Ross Winterowd
University of Southern California

[It is interesting and instructive to ask a colleague, "What have you read recently that you consider important to you as a teacher of composition? What has excited you? What do you recommend that the rest of us read?"
I put these questions to Ross Winterowd and he sent me the following list with his comments. How many of these books have you read? Ed.]

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TRAINING TEACHERS TO TEACH COMPOSITION

James Kinney
University of Florida

The growth of community/junior colleges and the concurrent decline in demand for literature teachers has focused attention on the need to train teachers of composition. Some institutions such as The Universities of Iowa, Massachusetts and Florida, Texas Christian University, Colorado State University, to name a few, have regularly offered courses or recently added ones for preparing teachers to teach writing. But many more graduate English programs continue to offer either no training in composition or training of limited value.

Perhaps the most common form of limited training has been the adoption of a basic recommendation in Albert Kitzhaber's 1965 Carnegie Report that graduate students be introduced to teaching composition by serving a supervised internship under an experienced teacher. While better than no preparation, if this apprenticeship is the only training, the graduate students may model their teaching exactly on what they see and go forth to do likewise forevermore, possibly perpetuating some of the worst teaching of writing. Because the supervising teachers have been teaching composition for ten or twenty years does not, unfortunately, mean that they know what they are doing. Frequently, the professor-models succeed best in transmitting to the graduate students the belief that while composition is important because it is necessary, it is also drudgery and less worthy than literature.

The common alternative to training teachers of writing solely by apprenticeship is to send English graduate students over to the education school for a course or two. Education courses, however, really focus more on pedagogy than on the subject of writing, and the lessons learned, while valuable, are also limited. Future teachers learn fourteen effective ways to teach paragraphing using transparencies, films and ads cut from magazines, but they do not learn why we believe that teaching good paragraphing is essential. Perhaps it is important for a composition teacher to know that the theory of paragraph-as-micro-theme originated with Alexander Bain in 1866, that in 1884, at Harvard, Barrett Wendell united this theory with a superficially logical progression from word to sentence to paragraph and canonized the result as the basic approach for teaching composition. Perhaps it is more important for a composition teacher to know that Wendell had started by introducing the "daily theme" at Harvard, but that the burdens of this practice proved too great for both teachers and students. Wendell then seized upon Bain's theory to rationalize reducing the assignment from daily theme to daily paragraph. The graduate student who learns by imitation to teach the paragraph as theme in miniature, and the graduate student who also learns fourteen effective ways to teach paragraphing, both still have a problem. They are using an approach formulated out of expediency nearly one hundred years ago, an approach they learned from someone who did not know the source and who was unaware of any advances made in the intervening century. We would scorn a colleague who taught such a course in history, in physics or in literature.

In an address at the CCCC convention in New Orleans two years ago, Paul Bryant made well the point that in all of academia, only in the teaching of composition do we operate ahistorically and continue to reinvent the wheel. One might add that in the process we usually seem to reinvent the square wheel.

We need to do in writing what we do in every other area—to provide and require course work in the history and theory of composition. If nothing else, these courses should help
break the cycle of adopting and abandoning panaceas, from the “daily theme” in the 1800's through the infatuation with semantics in the 1940's, with “communication” courses in the 1950's, with “relevance” in the 1960's and with behavioral objectives in the 1970's. Moreover, English graduate courses should all include courses, as Robert Gorrell and others have suggested, in updated versions of the medieval trivium—logic, grammar and rhetoric. The currently popular theoretical courses in linguistics should be supplemented with ones making practical application of linguistic theory to the teaching of composition. We do not need new degree programs in composition at every graduate institution; these programs would just add new cells to the already rampant malignancies of specialization and bureaucracy. Nor is adoption of a few courses a panacea; it is simply the first step on the long journey away from the present madhouse.

We can begin that journey not by providing answers but by raising questions. Does “good writing” consist of extensive vocabulary, adherence to white middle class grammar, correct spelling, planned organization and extensive development of ideas? If it does, then why do English teachers love to deride sociological and educational jargon, quoting passages as examples of bad writing when these selections exhibit all the qualities just listed? Logically, if there is any situation that should engender good student writing, should it not be a graduate English program? There we have small classes of well-prepared, highly-motivated students, the “best” teachers in the profession, frequent and extensive writing assignments prepared over several weeks. But what is usually produced? Is it “good writing,” or is it pseudo-PMLA garbage—an elevated, specialized form of Ken Macrorie’s “English”?

As we raise questions, we can point students toward possibly fruitful paths in their search for answers, or at least help them to avoid known dead-ends. Research in composition is going on and results are available to tell us that negative reinforcement does not work, that revising writing is important, that lessons in prescriptive grammar are counterproductive. Some of the work in transformational grammar has immediate practical value for composition. There is also Francis Christensen’s generative approach to the sentence, paragraph and essay. We can point to James Sied’s telling attack on bi- loquialism and to Jay Robinson’s suggestion that there is a crucial difference between making errors and diagnosing problems. We can at least acquaint English graduate students with people active in the search for answers. Those students know literary critics from Aristotle to the phenomenologists like Poulter, but they do not know Edward P. J. Corbett, Ken Macrorie, Robert Gorrell, Hans Ruth, Robert Zoelner, Jim Corder or Peter Elbow, to name a few stimulating contemporary writers about writing. Above all, we can teach our students of writing that the omniscient god of composition who laid down those awesome commandments—thou shalt not make any grave in common sense; thou shalt not commit sentence fragments; thou shalt not misspell thy words, and on through the catalogue of most grievous errors known to us all—is dead, and that chaos and struggle follow any Gotterdammerung, that there are not now nor ever will be any panaceas.

One reason there will never be any simple answer to the problems of teaching writing is that we as teachers have so little control over the most important elements in the equation, elements such as the students’ general environment and the conditions under which we teach.

If we are of professorial rank in a large university, we probably teach no more than twenty-five relatively well-prepared students in composition. We tend to forget, or have never known, that thirty years ago every state university had extensive remedial writing programs, which were abandoned in the 1950’s and early 1960’s when huge numbers seeking enrollment allowed the universities to become selective for the first time and to admit only students who had adequate preparation for college, or to flunk out quickly any of those who were not well-prepared. Instead of remembering, we may embrace the myth that in the old days every one could write well, and conveniently forget that in the last year before World War II, fifty percent of the eighteen year olds did not graduate from high school, of those who did only a small group, mostly from a relatively elite socio-economic background went on to college, and that many from that select group needed remedial work in writing when they got there. When we compare objectively the mass of students from all levels of society in college today who do at least approximate adequate writing ability, perhaps we should reevaluate our prattle about TV generations and our nostrums about preserving western culture. Instead of mechanically pursuing a century-old theory of composition and worrying about standards, we would be so much better off if our graduate training had prepared us to experiment with a variety of approaches more suitable to our small, relatively well-prepared group.

If we teach in a community college and face from seventy-five to over one hundred poorly prepared composition students every quarter instead of a small group once a year, our tendency may be to seek justification for survival tactics forced on us by our situation. Slogans from education courses about a “humanistic” approach to teaching composition may become unconscious rationalizations for not succeeding at the academic version of “mission impossible.” If we choose to approach composition through free writing in journals with the hope that in three months our one hundred students will increase their fluency, and possibly have an affective change in their attitude toward writing, there is no need for us to rationalize by claiming that all the writing produced is of high quality simply because it contains an element of honesty. Under the circumstances, the increased fluency and affective changes are accomplishments enough to be proud of; we should not denigrate ourselves or our students by always transliterating their limited, but real, achievements in developing writing skills into educationese about “student self-actualization.”

Composition contains so much. As Robert Gorrell suggests, “the constant self-examination and the frequent despair characteristic of any gathering of teachers of freshman English result from frustration of overabundance rather than poverty.” No teacher of writing can accomplish all the possible goals for composition in three months, or in nine. But, while there are no absolute answers, no panaceas, there are goals and approaches more suited to one set of circumstances than another. Graduate students in English should have the opportunity to explore the multiple possibilities for composition courses and should be prepared to adapt consciously, realistically and professionally to whatever may be their future circumstances as teachers of writing. The only solution to the problem of training teachers to teach writing is to start doing it, to send them forth onto the darkling plain equipped not with panaceas but with possibilities, and with the knowledge that no one who has been there expects miracles of them—only an honest struggle.

NOTES

3 Kitzhaber, p. 74.
4 Robert Gorrell, "Freshman Composition," rpt. in Teaching
The metaphor of a wheel is vehicular and dynamic in a double sense: First, it is synecdoche for the individual student who, with unique skills and motivation, is presumed to want to "go" somewhere. Second, the metaphor designates the program itself, an elaborate system of cross-references intended to focus upon the strengths and weaknesses of every student who elects to enter The Wheel rather than enroll in the conventional Freshman English class. The Wheel rolls five days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., when the bulk of students attend classes and when two master teachers are continuously available. The program operates in successive blocks of ninety minutes. During the first thirty minutes paraprofessionals attend to writers engaged in work designed to correct any error from faulty use of quotation marks to poor paragraphing. Writing errors have been divided into eight broad categories, and those categories further subdivided; hence appropriate material, from entire units to specific drills, may be selected from a central file and administered to the student as soon as his deficiency is identified. A student may need special work on the semicolon only, in which case he is not subjected to the entire punctuation unit, as would be the case in the regular Freshman track. In any case, however a student's shortcomings, the master teachers evaluate his attempts to correct them; later they look for improvement in the student's homework written for a grade.

The second "mini-block" is a forty minute assembly led by one or both of the master teachers of The Wheel. In the belief that until students themselves feel worthy they will have little to say in class or in their papers, assembly discussions are rooted in questions of human value, as are the readings from the required text. After assembly twenty minutes are reserved for conferences and information retrieval. Although students are assigned to specific sections in The Wheel, the program allows them to attend other sections and sequences if they are absent because of illness or family- or job-related obligations. Other important features of The Wheel include a criteria-referenced grading system, so that students need not compete with each other; a writing laboratory; a pool of tutors; lay readers; and a follow-up system that traces a student after he has had three consecutive absences.

If The Wheel is flexible and varied, it also allows for self-determination: students actually contract for grades. When a student enters The Wheel, he is given a stiff diagnostic test. Along with the results of that test he is presented with written guidelines for grades toward which he is encouraged to work. No written standards exist for D or F; and as yet it has not been necessary to fail a student, partly because students come into this program with their eyes open. The student is expected to become familiar with the ground rules of The Wheel and to understand the specific provisions of an overall grade contract. Suppose the student decides to contract for a grade of B. Before signing he will know, among other things, that "all essays shall be written in class and turned in on the day of composition," and that he must write five essays out of six with a grade of B or better, or at least three in a row after mid-term and before the eleventh week of the term.

Spelled out in a "contract," specifics such as this (even more specific in the contract) make for a clear understanding between student and instructor and for a clarification of the student's goals. It happens, of course, that students occasionally earn higher or lower grades than those for which they have contracted. A student may settle for the lower grade, or he may receive the higher grade if he has met the necessary standards. If he has not fulfilled his contract but wishes to do so, he is given a grade of NC (not complete). This entitles him to register for the following term and pick up where he left off. The important thing is that he is neither failed nor does he have to repeat the entire course. When he reaches his chosen level of performance, he has completed the course.

Space does not permit a complete listing of the resources of this specialized program within the conventional English offering. The point is that students committed to choosing writing goals that meet college standards will write to meet those standards. By focusing upon each error the student develops, partly through kinesis, a mechanism, analogous to Socrates' daemon, that tells him to "stop" on the verge of committing that same old error.

Although The Wheel is still in its infancy, it has already shown that it works. Students are enthusiastic, they do not drop out, they do not accept failure. In fact, we are so encouraged by the success of The Wheel that later this academic year we are planning to roll a Night Train.
LANHAM, THE JOY OF LANGUAGE,  
AND FRESHMAN ENGLISH

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I read with interest Leonard T. Tourney's review of Richard Lanham's *Style: An Anti-Textbook* (Yale Univ. Press, 1974) in the Fall, '74 issue of *Freshman English News* and was delighted to find that he found the book as exciting as I had when I read it several months earlier. He rightly sums up Lanham's main points and import in three sentences whose succinctness would be hard to improve on.

Most importantly [Lanham's work] 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 pre-occupied with self-discovery, social activism, or literary pseudo-criticism.

Unfortunately, however, my delight faded when I read on to discover Tourney's pessimistic appraisal of Lanham's possible influence on future freshman textbooks and syllabi. Although he recommends the book to all interested in style, Tourney feels that "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." I was startled, because I had been sitting back, patiently waiting for the Lanham revolution in Freshman English to occur just as soon as a new generation of texts could be prepared.

After reconsidering the matter, I still think I am right, and what follows are some reasons why Lanham is compatible with "vocationalism" and why, in fact, Lanham may even be more apropos to our "vocational" society inside and outside the university than Tourney seems to realize.

To begin with, Lanham is nothing if not fair. The first chapter, "The Prose Problem and 'The Books,'" makes all the concessions that could possibly be made to anyone convinced that ours is a society whose pragmatism and functionalism dictate that words should be used, not enjoyed. The essential question is, do our writing handbooks — "The Books" of Lanham's title — help the situation, are they likely to improve this cultural nightmare? Lanham's conclusion is that they do not. Instead, they exacerbate the situation by cancelling style out of existence with a superabundant emphasis upon clarity above everything else and a group of self-contradicting instructions which are bound to leave any student truly anxious to learn about writing — i.e., one who has not picked up decent habits through direct acculturation — thoroughly befuddled. What can anyone do with such confusing advice as "Be Plain / Avoid 'fine writing' / Avoid Bluntness / Articulate your sentences gracefully / Make your writing spontaneous / Revise! / Be Yourself / Imitate the masters / Write from your own experience / Read widely" and so on?

If the Books' task were not essentially hopeless, if the world of prose they imply were to come true, we would have "a world neither too short nor too long, neither formal nor familiar, neither impersonal nor idiosyncratic, neither too spontaneous nor too carefully revised." In short, Lanham concludes, "a bore." A great deal clearer than the prose we have today, but hardly scintillating and exciting.

Many would admit that clarity is not the only aim of prose.

But probably no other writing text would include a chapter, as Lanham does, on "The Uses of Obscurity." In fact, Lanham's discussion — and partial defense — of so-called obscurity is crucial both to his plea for a new method of teaching writing and to answering Tourney's doubts about his usefulness in a vocational society. Lanham's examples from what any decent Freshman English instructor would call a semi-literate student and from a memo to his peers from a college professor demonstrate that clarity is simply not the sum of what either is aiming at. Instead, both are trying to use their prose to project an ethos — a public self or persona. The student, whose example is all balled up in educationese, social science-ese, plus the routine problems of pronoun reference and subject-verb agreement, is doing a perfectly normal thing. He is trying to convey information and his own "expert" status at the same time. The professor, whose prose is clear enough but extraordinarily long-winded and convoluted by The Books' standards, is trying to tell his colleagues that something must be done about teaching evaluations. His overt verbal content is paraphrasable in three sentences — why then does he take a page and a half? It is because he must do so much more. On such a delicate issue, he must let his colleagues know that he realizes the controversial nature of the subject, that he can be relied upon to be discreet, and, finally, he must intimate that he is playing a very definite bureaucratic role — i.e., that he is chairing a committee whose job is to take off the heat generated by the demands for student evaluations, rather than to do anything truly positive. Faculty can rest assured that the final report will be just as vapid and platitudinous and devoid of real threat as his first letter. To make clarity the only criterion would be to deprive this man of his diplomatic purpose, just as it would render all of us incapable of uttering the veiled, meaningless noises that social harmony demands from time to time.

As Lanham illustrates with the above examples, one of the ways that we achieve a public role is through jargon, and he is the first to admit that our culture is saturated with it. But is "comma splice" any less jargon than "input" or "feedback?" The point overlooked is that jargon is the mark of any trade, of any role. And an appreciation of style as role-creating is fundamental to any reform of Freshman English. For the basis of this heavy-handed use of jargon and pretentiousness is what Lanham aptly characterizes as "style-hunger." One wants to define one's self in his own imitable style. And The Books are of no help. So the culture turns uncritically to the jargon of various professions and to the language play so evident in many popular songs and in advertising. Teleologically advertising may be corrupt, but its means often offer at least the illusion of language play for the sake of language play — of style.

Thus, paradoxically, the way out of Tourney's world of vocational education lies first in reforming ourselves and shaking off the delusion that all that is needed is good, functional prose (a commodity which, incidentally, the vocationalists and functionalists would probably be all in favor of). Instead, as Lanham suggests, we need to take advantage of the delight in language, in jargon, in the self-consciousness of advertising to develop a connoisseurship of language and to improve both the student's paper and the professor's letter cited above. Instead of clarity above all we should emphasize the process of role-creating. Of course, we should also make sure our students realize as Lanham puts it, that "written uncourtesy strives for imposture." That is to say, we need to develop in them a critical attitude towards any projection of self, showing that as well as being suited to the task, it can also be inflated, can be shallow beneath all the pompous diction, and, in any case, can never be total in any one manifestation.

To do such is to become involved in the rhetorical study of style. And future books, which I hope will follow Lan-
ham's seminal work, will then have accomplished what today seems impossible—a movement from the awful jargon and clumsy patterning that informs most of our attempts at writing to a genuine utilization of something we never really realized existed. That is, the joy of language inherent in ourselves and in our students.

**Book Reviews**


With the publication of Ross Winterowd's *The Contemporary Writer*, I can stop mimeographing my own course because we have a book that translates the best in recent rhetorical theory into practical use for the classroom. I'm impressed with the way Winterowd has interfaced types of discourse with the concept of writing as process, as well as how he has juxtaposed current linguistic and rhetorical theory on style with traditional descriptions. I find his presentations of Kinney's types of discourse—reference, expressive, literary, and persuasive—instructive for both student and teacher, especially through the use of Jakobson's elements of discourse (writer, context, structure, style, and audience) to analyze illustrative selections. The order in which Winterowd treats these types of discourse builds pedagogically along the lines that Moffet has suggested as normal stages of verbal development, from interior monologue to public argument, a spectrum of distances which appears again in the discussion of development. Such a continuum serves to erase a common student impression that writings such as "Creative" and "Research" exist in different universes of discourse, products of disparate processes.

The inclusion of Kinney's divisions of reference discourse (scientific, informative, and exploratory) is especially useful for preparing the student for his academic writing. In the section, "Writing About Literature," the book steers the student carefully between myriads of critical approaches aimed at turning him into a literary critic and his subjective likes and dislikes. I find the research paper section to be sensibly succinct, neither assuming that the college freshman knows how to research nor swamping him with tedious technicalities. Although the chapter on writing narrative and poetry is limited, its inclusion within the framework of the other types of discourse shows the student how the priority of elements in these two kinds of writing contrasts with the hierarchy of elements in the other types. The section on persuasive writing is more fully developed, effectively incorporating such recent rhetorical emphases as Burkin cooperation, stress on audience, and the ethical mood conveyed through tone. There is just enough treatment of logic to benefit the writer rather than engulf him in jargon. Here I found two ideas particularly worthy of study because of their implications for teaching: 1) that distinctions between deduction and induction serve better as organizing principles of discourse than as contrasting methods of inquiry, and 2) the trace classical structure of an argument can act as a heuristic procedure.

Intersecting with Kinney's types of discourse is another important feature of the book: its attention to writing as process, an orientation which moves in the right direction as rhetorical pedagogy. We have not yet solved, however, the theoretical and pedagogical problems of how to present the stages of the process without falsifying it as a mechanically linear movement. Within a book's organizational constraints, Winterowd handles the problem as well as anyone, cautioning that the stages of the process are recursive. The opening discussion of situation and constraints pushes forward our understanding of one of the least researched areas of the process: its inception. The section on the gathering of materials (one of the book's unique features) is especially welcome in a textbook, clarifying as it does the nature and importance of invention and providing cogent explanations of some of the best current models: Burke's Pentad, Young, Becker and Pike's tagnemonic model, problem solving, and Larson's questions. The talk-realt-write-rewrite strategy for starting, which apparently first came to prominence with Zoellner, is presented as part of a larger organic process, thus avoiding some of the criticism Zoellner received. In the chapter on development, I like the way the helpful anthology of paragraph types is proposed as a range of alternative means rather than as rhetorical ends, an impression left by many other texts which exhaust a student in performing prodigies of imitation. In this treatment of process, as elsewhere, Winterowd's inclusion of a variety of theories necessarily prohibits an in-depth discussion of each one, an advantage that a text based on a single theory would have. I prefer his approach, however, as both a teacher of writing and a director of teaching fellows because its incorporation of some of the best recent work in rhetoric offers the teacher intelligent choices, instead of a single magic formula for teaching writing. We have suffered too long from the publishers' yearly campaigns to promote the latest Messiah that will save the writing course. Because so many graduate English programs still lack rhetorical theory courses, we need a book that will put teachers in the way of ongoing work in rhetoric, adapted to the classroom as Winterowd has done.

The book is also welcome for its insistence on audience as narrowly in the bones of each type of discourse. The analysis of "universal" and "specific" audiences helps, concisely directions to help the student juggle this slippery element of writing. I would have liked to see here a discussion of the tagnemonic principle of finding shared bridges as well as the Rogerian notion of reduction of threat—both valuable audience considerations.

Although I am wary of the value of teaching linguistics in a writing course, I think Part Two on style wisely begins with a discussion of some linguistic concepts needed for an intelligent presentation of syntax and diction. Winterowd takes pains to clear away the web of misconception that a knowledge of grammar affects a student's ability to write. Instead he explains that the student's passive understanding of grammar forms a matrix out of which he can develop syntactic versatility. From recent work in linguistics and rhetoric, the book presents an ample list of alternative embedding techniques and a variety of Christensen's cumulative sentences juxtaposed with traditional descriptions of syntax such as simple/complex or periodic/loose. The section on words illustrates such variant forms and special usages as nonstandard, slang, Glossolygoyk, and figurative language, singling out metaphor, simile, and irony as most useful to the student writer. The entire presentation on style is carefully nonprescriptive, emphasizing choice and context, not correctness, a distinction between rhetoric and grammar that many students lack from high school where their writing courses were not infrequently grammar courses.

I anticipate several uses for the selections presented for stylistic analysis and for the examples of student writing, but I intend to use them particularly in the development of self-criticism in students as well as the power to critique each other in group work.

Winterowd doesn't talk down to students nor duck hard questions such as dialect or the uselessness of writing.

Overall the book is such a rich repository for teaching writing that it could well provide the material for several courses. But there is a price for being comprehensive. If a teacher makes wise choices, the attempt at inclusion and
variety is the book’s strength. But if the instructor teaches the
book instead of students, a fifteen week dash though The
Contemporary Writer could leave the student confused and
discouraged. That is not to say that the book is written primarily
for teachers — its language speaks delightfully to students,
or rather to writers. It is designed not only to instruct but
also persuade the student of the excitement and value of
writing and to demonstrate the complex and intriguing arts
involved in using the language masterfully. After encountering
such a book, how could anyone say that the student has
nothing to learn from Freshman English?

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A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric. By Frank
D’Angelo. Winthrop Publishers Inc., 1975,
188 pp.

Amy Lowell saw herself as a rare pattern. And Robert
Frost pondered the presence of design in small things. But
were they poets, and we all have been trained to know that
poetry and poems depend upon arranging the smallest
particles of language into whole literary works. As literary critics we
look for image clusters and describe meters. We classify the
rhythms and show how patterns of line length or stanzaic forms
set off the development of ideas. Indeed, given our training in
the New Criticism we may even forget that form exists for
more than its own sake. Perhaps, though, emphasis on formal
analysis has been with us so long that we have become especially
excited with recent efforts of rhetoricians to concentrate on
the generation of ideas, the finding of materials to be reported.
Too, we may have become bored with the mechanical pre-
scriptions of rhetorics which offer students advice about writing
in over-simplified or ill-defined patterns. Somehow we have
wanted feeling to be first, and we have doubted those who
worried about the syntax of things.

Fortunately, the rhetoricians themselves have been conscious of
the complexity of their discipline, so few have offered theories of
invention with the messianic incantations which accompany the
one true way, even though occasionally some
textbook writers and anthologists write as though they were
recording messages from Sinai. The scholars with comprehensive
theories have been cautious. They have cited large
numbers of authorities from many fields to support them, they
have insisted on the provisional nature of their own work, and
they have pointed out their own difficulties. Frank D’Angelo
takes this approach — thorough, cautious, tentative, and yet
moving from a limited base to wide implication. Although he
is implicitly comprehensive, he begins with a concern for ar-
range ment. Seeing patterns in language as the mirror of and
the guide to concepts is not merely a game for poets but a
rule for us all always. The problem is to be clever enough to
recognize the kinds of design and use them aptly.

For experienced rhetoricians probably the most interesting
parts of A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric are the details, the
ways D’Angelo relates the general concepts to each other and
works out their implications. The raw materials of the argument
are at least generally available, if not quite familiar, but
the juxtaposition is instructive. The particular points are too
numerous for a short review; one can only tell the professional
that it is a required book. Yet, for the person who is just learning
to teach composition, or who has resisted theory, or who
has been seized in the groves of literature and impressed into
the armies of composition teachers, the main assumptions are
important, and the book cannot be properly valued unless at
least some of its bases are understood.

First, D’Angelo is not dealing with “mere” rhetoric. For
him rhetoric draws on cognitive psychology, literary criticism,
linguistics, sociology, psycho-linguistics, anthropology, psy-
choneurology, biology, and many other disciplines. Yet, it is
not quite the queen of the sciences — it doesn’t quite command
the others as philosophy might claim to do — rather it is the
assembly where the separate insights are brought to bear on
the processes of thought as formed in language. If D’Angelo
doesn’t quite ask the rhetorician to be a master of all know-
edge, still he expects the student to listen to the specialists
from many disciplines and draw their insights together.

In a sophisticated way D’Angelo revives the old saw that
writing is thought — and rhetoric is the study of the prin-
ciples upon which writing is constructed. The rhetorician
selects from the emphases and points of view of various
disciplines in order to reveal the processes of thought as mani-
fested in discourse — hence a conceptual theory of rhetoric.
He sees our rage for order as biologically based and accepts
at least pragmatically that human perception of order reflects
a reality outside of the perceiver. He draws heavily upon
paganist psychologists and their fellow travelers in order to
suggest that a useful approach to theory might begin with
structures, patterns, order, and then radiate out to the other
traditional concerns and categories of rhetoric.

This assumption that order is basic to human nature sug-
gests D’Angelo’s focus on arrangement, but rhetoric is a tan-
gled web and D’Angelo is a synthesizer rather than a separator,
for although he provides lists and divisions and definitions and
the other machinery of logical categorization, he emphasizes
underlying unity. Atomism is out. One can hardly talk about
arrangement without thinking of the discrete parts which are to
be patterned, but D’Angelo repeats several times in several
ways that the problems of generating ideas and finding exact
language, although theoretically separate from patterning, are
nonetheless practically one. The terminology of the categories
reveals the purpose or point of view of the rhetorician contem-
plating the reality of the whole discipline of rhetoric.

Theories, which are constructed of categories, reflect pat-
terns and are powerful in controlling the concepts which make
sense of the world, but they are embodied, made flesh as the
logos incarnated, in individual experiences. Once an experience
is expressed in language, it exists in a pattern, an arrangement.
The function of rhetoric is to enable us to find the right
order. Stated so badly in over-simplification the idea seems
crude, even as discussions of Unity in the Trinity usually seem
crude, but still it suggests that D’Angelo is concerned with
process while he concentrates on a segment of rhetoric often
associated with the static product. For some readers the al-
ternation between separation and fusion of terms in D’Angelo’s
discussion will be confusing, yet it is crucial for avoiding sim-
ple-minded rule making. Those experienced in teaching tech-
nical writing, for example, will be prepared to sympathize
with how some minds are made generative by starting with
prescribed patterns to fit common situations. The uninhibited
working out of the formulae within rather narrowly prescribed
stylistic patterns seems to generate ideas for technicians just as
the confines of the sonnet stimulate some poets.

To develop a complete theory D’Angelo allows space for
non-logical orders as well as logical ones even though he is
forced to concede that more research is needed to define the
non-logical systems. In dealing logically with non-logical or-
ganization one must by indirection find direction out. Or to
shift from allusion to metaphor, one must as in night vision
look out of the corner of the eye at the object, not directly, or
the object disappears.

Another of D’Angelo’s problems of exposition is implied
by his most extended example of analysis, which is taken
from literary prose. The fact that it is from a work of fiction
probably is not important, although that may muddy the waters
for some, but literary language is the most highly patterned
because it attempts to deal complexity with interwoven con-
cept. To read and write such prose is a mark of maturity, but D’Angelo’s examples of student writing are also good, although much simpler. Probably most human activity is carried on efficiently at such lower levels of consciousness. Concern with arrangement is still important, and if students do not need to acquire professional literary skill, they still need to become as sophisticated as possible in recognizing available patterns in language. D’Angelo’s analyses and careful definitions may very well help teachers design the exercises which will enable students to acquire a range of competencies.

Richard Lloyd-Jones
University of Iowa

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