GRAMMARS OF STYLE:
NEW OPTIONS IN COMPOSITION

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University of Tulsa

Among the scattered papers of the late Professor X., I have found these jottings: Did some student write them or did Professor X. compose them himself?

Words on paper—one of the ways I — the human being — communicate. There are all the other ways, of course. Talking, gesturing, moving my body. Costuming my flesh. Participating in events "out there" in unobservable actions. But tremendously important always/words on paper/the string of words in the code of written language, effecting the composition — the "thing made"/the verbal artifact — that I transmit to others for them to negotiate into the miracle of understanding what it is/has been inside the otherwise inaccessible regions of my very human, mysterious brain.

To communicate—but not simply information and data. Not simply knowledge. But emotion, too. Attitude. Stance. Even "style" and "manner" themselves. "Look," I often want to say, "This is anger!" "This is confusion!" "This is enigma!" "This is the way I see the universe — mixed up, ambiguous, disorderly." "Or" "simplistic, barren, vacant." "Or" "complex, baroque, impenetrable." Even, at times, I want to say, "The message is: there is no message."

I write for many reasons, to communicate many things. And yet, much of what I wish to communicate does not seem to be expressible within the ordinary conventions of composition as I have learned them and mastered them in the long years of my education. As I grow older, more experienced, perhaps even more mature, I sense that many of the things I want to say do not always "fit" into the communication vehicles I have been taught to construct.

What I've been taught to construct is: the well-made box. I have been taught to put "what I have to say" into a container that is always remarkably the same, that — in spite of varying decorations — keeps to a basically conventional form: a solid bottom, four upright sides, a fine-fitting lid. Indeed, I may be free to put "what I have to say" in the plain box or in the ornate box, in the large box or the small box, in the fragile box or in the sturdy box. But always the box — squatish or rectangular. And I begin to wonder if there isn't somewhere a round box or oval box or tubular box, if somewhere there isn't some sort of container (1) that will allow me to package "what I have to say" without trimming my "content" to fit into a particular compositional mode, (2) that will actually encourage me to discover new "things to say" because of the very opportunity a newly-shaped container gives me, (3) that will be more suitable perhaps to my own mental processes, and (4) that will provide me with a greater rhetorical flexibility, allowing me to package what I have to say in more ways than one and thus reach more audiences than one.

Occasionally, a wise teacher of composition will acknowledge, "Yes, there are other ways of writing," other voices in other rooms, but the same wise teacher rarely ventures (is it possible? is it permissible?) to explain and demonstrate the "other ways" and provide me with a more extensive range of compositional forms, grammars, vehicles. More frequently, I am told — I who have read Joyce and Stein and Barth and Barthes and Woolf and Wolfe — that I must distinguish between "creative writing" (nice for Sunday outings into the realms of poetry and fiction) and "ordinary composition" (very practical, young man, for making a living and selling your goods and communicating with all the good decent folks here about). That "you should learn to walk before you learn to swim." That if I have talent I may want to take a course in creative writing (it's an elective), but "don't think it's going to save you from the 500-word theme or the second-semester research paper."

But I'm not asking for that. I'm asking simply to be exposed to, and informed about, the full range of compositional possibilities. That I be introduced to all the tools, right now, and not be asked to wait for years and years until I have mastered right-handed affairs before I learn anything about left-handed affairs. That, rather, I be introduced to all the grammars/vehicles/tools/compositional possibilities now so that even as I "learn to write" I will have before me as many resources as possible. That all the "ways of writing" be spread out before me and that my education be devoted to learning how to use them.

One of our major tasks as teachers of composition is to identify compositional options and teach students the mastery of the options and the liberating use of them. We must identify options in all areas — in vocabulary, usage, sentence forms, dictional levels, paragraph types, ways of organizing material into whole compositions: options in all that we mean by style. Without options, there can be no adjustment to the diversity of communication occasions that confront us in our various lives.
To identify options we must not only know about those already established in the language but we must also be alert to emerging ones, and in some cases we must even participate in creating options that do not yet exist but which would be beneficial if they did. We must never suppose that the options in front of us represent the complete and final range of possibilities and that now we can relax: that because we have options enough to avoid rigidity and totalitarianism that we have thus fulfilled our obligations to do all we can to free the human mind and the communication system from it.

Most of us do, of course, make options available to our students. Most of us have long shucked off the prescriptions and strictures of an earlier day that gave us "no choice" in how to write but insisted only upon the "one good way." Most of us who teacher writing attempt to provide our students with a repertoire of writing styles — from the plain to the elegant, from the tough to the sweeter, from the colloquial to the formal, from the simple to the complex — in order that our students may make more refined stylistic decisions in consideration of subject matter, audience, occasion, and so forth. Many of us have argued for many years now that our task is to reveal to our students a full range of styles and to provide our students with a rationale for making appropriate selections from that range.

Yet even in our acceptance and inculcation of pluralism and diversity, we stay — if we stop and think about it — within the safe confines of a generalized "grammar of style," a grammar within which our options are related one to another, all basically kin, none of which takes us outside a certain approved and established area.

By "grammar of style" I mean the "set of conventions governing the construction of a whole composition; the criteria by which a writer selects the stylistic materials, method of organization and development, compositional pattern and structure he is to use in preparing any particular composition." This "grammar" defines and establishes the boundaries in which a composition must take place and defines the communication goals to which a composition is committed.

Any number of such "grammars" may theoretically exist and be available to a writer at any one time. Yet on a practical level, in today's classroom we keep all our stylistic options within the confines of one grammar only — a grammar that has no particular name (we can call it the "traditional" grammar of style) but has the characteristics of continuity, order, reasonable progression and coherence, consistency, unity, etc. We are all familiar with these characteristics for they are promoted in nearly every freshman English textbook and taught by nearly every English teacher.

Our assumption — regardless of liberality so far as diversity of styles is concerned — is that every composition must be well-organized and unified, must demonstrate logic, must contain well-developed paragraphs; that its structure will manifest a beginning, middle, and end; that the composition will reveal identifiable types of order; that so far as the composition deals with time it will reveal a general diachronicity; etc. Our teaching and texts will be concerned, almost without exception, with "subject and thesis," "classification and order," "beginning and ending," "expansion," "continuity," "emphasis," and the like. All remains, in other words, within a particular grammar of style that leads to compositions that "make sense"; it is a grammar that cannot tolerate a mixed metaphor because a mixed metaphor is not "reasonable," and cannot tolerate a mixture of the impersonal third-person "one" and the impersonal "you" because that would be "inconsistent" and contrary to "unity."

We allow options "within reason." We allow options, but only those that fit within a particular box.

In our charity, we allow our students to write in one style or another —

Arriving in London in the spring of 1960, when crocuses were first blooming in Regency Park, I went directly to the Mount Royal Hotel (the hospitality that many an American tourist knows very well, located as it is on Oxford Street, near the Marble Arch and Hyde Park and conveniently located near everything an American tourist wants to see) where I registered for a room and indicated my intention to stay for seven or eight weeks at least.

I arrived in London in the spring of 1960. Crocuses were blooming in Regency Park. I went directly to the Mount Royal Hotel. It's located on Oxford Street, near Marble Arch and Hyde Park, and it's convenient to a lot of things the American tourist wants to see. I checked in at the hotel and told the clerk I was going to stay in London seven or eight weeks at least.

but both must do just about the same thing. You can try to write like Henry James or you can try to write like Ernest Hemingway, but you must not forget that both James and Hemingway, quite different in their literary styles, wrote within the same "grammar of style"; neither of them went beyond the parameters that Grammar A provides.

It is as though we told a card-player that his deck of fifty-two cards (equal let's say to the "things we can do with language, our stylistic materials") is good only for playing the game of bridge. As good teachers, we explain the rules of bridge to the same time point out to the student/player his options within bridge: he can play the Culbertson system or the Green system or the Jacoby system. And indeed he can play his bridge hands even contrary to best advice if he himself so decides, though tradition and good sense usually suggest that he draw trumps early in the hand and play second hand low. We teach him to play bridge, to practice a certain freedom within it (he can conceivably play "high style" or "low style" or "middle style") but there is no way under the sun that he can, in playing bridge, meld a pinochle or "shoot the moon."

Not that anyone really argues that while playing bridge one should not play bridge. But our fault is that we teach students to play bridge only and to have access only to the options that bridge provides. We teach only one "grammar" and we only provide square/rectangular boxes. We don't teach students other games with other options. And in our teaching, when someone does "meld a pinochle" at the bridge table, all we know to do is to mark it in red ink and say "wrong," without ever suggesting to the student that if he wants to meld pinochle he might like to know about another game where it would be very "right."

We identify our favored "grammar of style," our favored game and box, as the "good" grammar of style, and we identify what it produces as "good writing." And anything that looms upon the horizon as a distinctly different possibility we generally attack as "bad writing," or identify as "creative writing which we don't teach in this class" or ignore altogether, claiming it is a possibility that only rare persons (like James Joyce or Gertrude Stein) could do anything with and that ordinary mortals should scrupulously avoid.

Yet there it is. The beast sniffing outside the door. And ultimately we must deal with it.

It is, of course, another grammar of style, another set of conventions and criteria, another way of writing that offers yet more options and offers us yet further possibilities for rhetorical adaptations and adjustments. It is not just another "style" — way out on the periphery of our concerns — but is an altogether different "grammar" of style, an alternate grammar, Grammar B, with characteristics of variation, synchronicity, discontinuity, ambiguity, and the like. It is a grammar of style, no longer an experiment, but a mature grammar used by competent writers and offering students of writing a well tested "set of options" that, added to the
traditional grammar of style, will give them a much more flexible voice, a much greater communication capacity, a much greater opportunity to put into effective language all the things they have to say.

And be assured: Grammar B in no way threatens Grammar A. It uses the same stylistic "deck of fifty-two cards" and embraces the same English language with which we are familiar. Acknowledging its existence and discovering how it works and including it in our writing expertise, we simply become better teachers of writing, making a better contribution to the intellectual and emotional lives of our students.

An alternate "grammar of style" actually has been present in Anglo-American writing for quite some time now, at least since the end of the eighteenth century, though its presence has generally been obscured by the simple relegation of it to fiction and poetry. Until recent times, it has never been tolerated outside "imaginative writing" and even within "imaginative writing" it has been considered simply an eccentricity by a "few crazy writers," not to be taken seriously by anyone else. Laurence Sterne's violation of narrative in *Tristram Shandy* provides great fun, but surely no one would suggest that some of Sterne's tricks and his over-all manner might be considered a useful part of every writer's stylistic knowledge—how would they?

Relegation of Grammar B to fiction and poetry did not mean, however, that Grammar B was never used as an acceptable alternative in prose nonfiction. There are instances where writers did dare to use Grammar B in lieu of A, even in Grammar A's supposedly sacrosanct territories. Such writers in the nineteenth century as William Blake (in the prefatory remarks to each book of *Jerusalem*, for instance) and Walt Whitman (in the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* and in *An American Primer*) and such writers as D. H. Lawrence (certainly in *Studies in Classic American Literature*) and Gertrude Stein (in such essays as *Reflection on the Atomic Bomb*, *Descriptions of Literature, et alia*) in the twentieth century demonstrated the use of Grammar B in prose nonfiction efforts. (Interestingly enough, Lawrence's statement in "The Spirit of the Place," first chapter in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, is, though dealing with American literary content, very à propos to the grammar of style in which he is writing: "It is hard," he says, "to hear a new voice, as hard as it is to listen to an unknown language.... Why?—Out of fear. The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything. Because a new experience displaces so many old experiences. And it is like trying to use muscles that have perhaps never been used, or that have been going stiff for ages. It hurts horribly.")

The efforts of such earlier prose practitioners gave the necessary precedent for bringing Grammar B out of the closet of fiction/poetry and making it a viable contemporary prose—especially when the innovative fiction writers in the post-World War II period, writers like Barth, Barthelme, Brecht, Burroughs, and others, developed Grammar B into a full-fledged and endearing kind of writing, with a full display of its capacities and possibilities in a remarkable number of stories, novels, plays, and even poetry.

The precedent of using Grammar B in prose and the grand demonstrations of Grammar B in latter-day fiction/poetry coalesced in the emergence of the "new journalism," and if any single event can be identified as establishing Grammar B as a truly significant alternative in our times it is Tom Wolfe's writing his now-famous essay, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby" for *Esquire* magazine in 1963. According to Wolfe's own account, he went to California for *Esquire* to do a story on custom cars; having studied the California car-culture, he returned to New York and sat down to write his copy. He "had a lot of trouble analyzing exactly what I had on my hands." (Note the key word "analyzing" which has to do with the traditional grammar of style.) Finally up against a deadline, the only thing Wolfe could do was to "type up my notes" with the understanding that the *Esquire* editor "will get somebody else to write the story." About eight in the evening, Wolfe started typing his notes in the form of a memorandum; "I just started recording it all, and inside a couple of hours, typing along like a madman, I could tell that something was beginning to happen. By midnight this memorandum was... twenty pages long, and I was still typing like a maniac. About 2 A.M. I turned on WABC, a radio station that plays rock and roll music all night, and got a little more manic. I wrapped up the memorandum about 6:15 A.M. and by this time it was 49 pages long. I took it over to *Esquire* as soon as they opened about 9:30 A.M." (Note Wolfe's "madman" and "maniac" and "maniac" references—words that should not be read pejoratively at all, but as attempts simply to describe something contrary to analysis and order.

*Esquire* published it "as written" and thus "new journalism" was introduced into contemporary culture and thus, too, Grammar B made its most dramatic appearance in contemporary prose style: a grammar that could tolerate the quasi-morphousness of a memo, the on-going chain effect of thought-association, the incorporation of "notes" directly into a text.

Listening to Wolfe's account, we have to take notice, of course, of the part that twentieth-century electronic media have played in bringing the alternate grammar on stage. Wolfe's listening to rock and roll music on radio was but a minor incident so far as his own composition was concerned, yet the influence of radio, television and movies on the evolution of Grammar B is tremendously important. Many of the stylistic devices that finally became a part of Grammar B are based upon cinematic techniques as well as upon the audio techniques found in radio and stereo systems. More important, it was the electronic media that used an alternate grammar of style so frequently and so powerfully that the grammar could no longer be ignored; especially the movies—emerging as the most exciting art form of the century—revealed the alternate grammar in such spectacular and acceptable ways to such sizeable audiences that Anglo-American culture in the sixties and seventies was prepared to be hospitable when the same grammar of style flowered in written composition.

The alternate grammar of style has received a certain amount of describing and evaluating in recent times, mainly by literary critics, though no real codification of the style has taken place. (You can't buy a textbook there that will show you how to write in Grammar B.) Most discussions are still tentative attempts to define the "grammar," to indicate the general boundaries of it, to suggest its general characteristics. Only recently in the New York Times Book Review, Roger Shattuck discussed, in his review of Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* (November 9, 1975), the characteristics of a certain way of writing that he acknowledges runs all the way from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, through Baudelaire's prose poems, to such recent novels as Paul Metcalf's *Genius*, Guy Davenport's *Tallin*, Alan Robb-Griller's *In the Labyrinth*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Though Shattuck, rather typically of current commentators, limited his discussion to works of fiction, he nevertheless was dealing with the alternate grammar of style which, according to his analysis, is characterized by four basic techniques: montage, pastiche, linguistic generation (that is, one supposes, a great deal of word play and linguistic manipulation) and superabundant that is, one supposes, a great amount of verboicity, repetition, restatement).

Shattuck's very brief and limited list of characteristics is, nevertheless, a sign of a growing attempt in American literature/writing to codify the alternate grammar, to say just exactly how it does work. And behind the attempt at codifica-
tion is perhaps the recognition of the alternate grammar as having validity as an equal partner in composition in general. Admittedly, Shattuck sets the questions, "Who let all these kinds of chaos out of the bag?... Can he so easily jettison the myth of organic unity?" And the questions imply skepticism and some anxiety. Yet behind the questions is perhaps the recognition that the alternate grammar is not going away.

And why won't it go away? There are two major justifications for the alternate grammar, justifications for its emergence and endurance over the past century or two, and for its particular validity here in the final decades of the twentieth century. First of all, there is a general cultural value, so we increasingly have style, in having access to "both sides of the coin" in all our affairs, to having access — in life styles or literary styles — to what William Blake labelled the "contraries." The "contrary" or "alternate" completes a picture, saves us from the absoluteness of one single style, provides us with the stimulating, illuminating, and refreshing opposite that makes the traditional grammar of style even more meaningful and useful: as the alternate grammar of style more and more takes on strong and viable identity, so the traditional grammar is lifted from the lethargy/tenuousness of its solitude.

However, second, a certain "through the looking glass" quality to the alternate grammar but that very quality reminds us, in composition as in life, that wholeness must embrace all possibilities; that true expertise in writing must always be able to evaluate one writing procedure in the context provided by a totally different writing procedure.

Second, the alternate grammar is "justified" today because it is seen by many writers as a more appropriate grammar so far as the communication of certain realities is concerned. Many writers believe that there are "things to say," not only in fiction but in nonfiction as well, that simply cannot be effectively communicated via a traditional grammar; that there are "things to say" in a highly technological, electronic, socially complex, politically and spiritually confused era that simply cannot be reflected in language if language is limited to the traditional grammar; that the "conventions" of language in the traditional grammar are so much a product of certain thought processes, certain world views, certain notions about the nature of man and society that the conventions force upon much of our content a compromise, a qualification, an unwanted prevarication. Whether or not "style" can ever "match" reality is a debatable question, of course; but if the illusion can be maintained by rhetoricians and stylists that the traditional grammar somehow matches and corresponds to an orderly universe or an orderly mentality, then surely a similar illusion can be justified that a variegated, discontinuous, fragmented grammar of style corresponds to an amorphous and inexplicable universe and mentality. More important than whether such a correspondence is "true" is the fact that it can be taught and maintained as a writing convention; a mixed metaphor may not really correspond to a mixed world, but if we agree upon it then it does: the mixed metaphor becomes a "word" in our stylistic vocabulary the definition of which is "mixed-upness" — mixed-up societies, personalities, cultures, and what have you.

(One of the most vigorous justifications of the alternate grammar of style on grounds of better correspondence with reality is that given by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer in their introduction to Innovative Fiction [New York: Dell, 1972]. Though talking only about fiction, their argument applies finally to all kinds of writing: "The reorganization of values in the twentieth century has displaced man from his traditional notion of self. To regain any notion of the self at all, new writers... have placed themselves at the fore of movements to understand and artistically interpret the Einsteinian, relativistic, fourth-dimensional world, and the quality of man's life in it.")

Other justifications for the alternate grammar can perhaps be found. (Perhaps it is justifiable on the grounds of "novelty" or "welcome relief" if nothing else.) But the justification of "wholeness through inclusion of the alternate" and "betten correspondence with certain aspects of reality" have been enough to support the alternate grammar and give writers reason to push the grammar beyond experimentation and give it the status of utility.

The writer who wishes to practice the alternate grammar — for whatever reasons — will want to master a number of stylistic maneuvers and conventions from which he may select, just as he does in the traditional grammar, the particular devices/schemes/techniques that seem useful in a particular communication/historical situation and that he can combine into the "style" appropriate, as he so judges, to the composition he is writing. The following presentation of such maneuvers/conventions/devices is not complete, of course, but is representative of the sort of writing practices found in the alternate grammar and does provide a writer with a basic and beginning set of "things to do":

The Crot. A crot (crots, plural) is an obsolete word meaning "bit" or "fragment." The term was given new life by Tom Wolfe in his "Introduction" to a collection of Esquire magazine fiction, The Secret Life of Our Times, edited by Gordon Lish (New York: Doubleday, 1973). A basic element in the alternate grammar of style, and comparable somewhat to the "stanzas" in poetry, the crot may range in length from one sentence to twenty or thirty sentences. It is fundamentally an autonomous unit, characterized by the absence of any transitional devices that might relate it to preceding or subsequent crots and because of this independence and discrete nature of crots, they create a general effect of metaraxis — using that term from classical rhetoric to label, as Fritz Sen recently suggested in the James Joyce Quarterly (Summer, 1975), any "rapid transition from one point of view to another." In its most intense form, the crot is characterized by a certain abruptness in its termination: "As each crot breaks off," Tom Wolfe says, "it tends to make one's mind search for some point that must have just been made — presque sur — almost seen! In the hands of a writer who really understands the device, it will have you making crazy leaps of logic, leave you never dreamed of before."

The provenance of the crot may well be in the writer's "note" itself — in the research note, in the sentence or two

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one jot down to record a moment or an idea or to describe a person or place. The crot is essentially the "note" left free of verbal ties with other surrounding notes.

Very brief crots have the quality of an aphorism or proverb, while longer crots may have the quality of descriptive or narrative passages found in the traditional grammar of style. The crot of whatever kind may be presented in nearly random sequence or in sequences that finally suggest circularity. Rarely is any stronger sense of order (such as would be characteristic of traditional grammar) imposed upon them — though the absence of traditional order is far more pronounced when the grammar is used in fiction and poetry. The general idea of unrelatedness present in crot writing suggests correspondence — for those who seek it — with the fragmentation and even egalitarianism of contemporary experience, wherein the events, personalities, places of life have no particular superior or inferior status to dictate priorities of presentation.

Nearly always crots are separated one from the other by white space, and at times each crot is given a number or, upon rare occasion, a title. That little spectrum — white space only, white space plus a numbering, white space plus a titling — provides a writer with a way of indicating an increase in separation, discreetness, isolation. Occasionally, but rarely, crot is not separated from the other typographically but the reader is left to discover the "separation" while he seems to be reading a linear, continuous text; jamming crots against each other becomes a fourth option in presentation, one that provides a greater sense of surprise (or perhaps bewilderment) for the reader.

The effect of writing in crots is intensified, of course, as the number increases. Since each crot is not unlike a "snapshot" or a color slide, the over-all composition, using crots, is similar to a "slide" show, especially if the slides have not been arranged into any neat and tidy order. "My Trip to New Orleans" written in traditional grammar will have some sort of orderly quality to it: the trip will be presented chronologically, spatially, or what have you. But "My Trip to New Orleans," written in the alternate grammar, will depend, not upon the order in which the "slides" appear, but upon the sharp, exceptional quality of each crot or "slide" and upon the "crazy leaps of logic" that Wolfe mentioned, with the reader jolted from one snapshot to the next, frequently surprised to be given an "aerial view of New Orleans as the plane begins its descent to the airport" and immediately after that "a close-up of an antique candelabrum used in a Louisiana ante-bellum mansion and now on sale in a New Orleans antique store" followed by "a broad shot of Canal Street" followed by a picture of "Marge and Myrtle getting into the taxicab at the airport to come into the city."

Crots at their best will not be all that banal of course in content, but will have some sharp, arresting, or provocative quality to them. Even if they are unable to stand alone as mini-compositions (sometimes they actually are capable of that) and gain their full effect in association with others, each one should have a certain integrity and interestingness about it. Crots may be written in any dictional style deemed appropriate to the communication occasion, with a single dictional style prevailing, usually, throughout an entire composition. On rare occasions, dictional level may shift from one crot to another, but usually the level of diction is a constant.

Crots are akin, obviously, to a more general kind of "block" writing — the kind of writing found, for instance, in E. M. Forster's Two Cheers for Democracy and in Katherine Anne Porter's essay Audubon's Happy Land." In such block writing, the authors have strung together short, fairly discrete units of composition to make whole compositions. Likewise, a series of crots is not unlike a collection of aphorisms. The case of Eric Hoffer or the book like The Passionate State of Mind and Other Aphorisms, has brought together brief compositional units, some a sentence long, some several para-

graph, long, each quite distinct from the other, yet grouped into a whole composition on the basis of a certain attitude and view of life common to them all. These compositions of "blocks" or "aphorisms" are so much in the spirit of crot writing that they may be considered a part of its development out of a traditional grammar of style into the alternate grammar. The writing of Forster, Porter, and Hoffer — in fiction and non-fiction — gives evidence of the usefulness of something other than the ordered, linear procedure of traditional grammar even to writers who would not be identified as especially experimental or stylistically daring.

The Labyrinthine Sentence and the Sentence Fragment. Though the alternate grammar of style uses the ordinary range of sentence types, it makes use also, and more frequently, of two radical sentence types: the labyrinthine sentence and the sentence fragment. And it tolerates a certain mixture of sentence types that would not be found in the traditional grammar of style. The alternate grammar tolerates great leaps from the long, labyrinthine sentence to the short fragmentary sentence, creating a sharp, startling effect at times. Yet it is not committed entirely to the startling juxtaposition often enough a composition in the alternate style will be wholly labyrinthine or wholly fragmentary. At times, a most ordinary traditional sentence "style" will prevail. Usually, if traditional sentence types are to be mixed with the more radical forms, the mix will involve only traditional types and sentence fragments. Rarely do the traditional sentences and labyrinthine sentences mix successfully.

The labyrinthine sentence is a long complex sentence, with a certain "endless" quality to it, full of convolution marked by appositives, parentheses, digressions. A parody through exaggeration of the highly structured Johnsonian sentence of the eighteenth century, the labyrinthine has immediate ancestry in the long, radical sentences of twentieth-century fiction — such as the famous Molly Bloom one-sentence soliloquy that ends Joyce's Ulysses. The current master of the labyrinthine sentence is John Barth — but there are numerous other practitioners: one interesting (and perhaps unlikely) example that comes to mind is the opening sentence of Rousseau and Revolution by Will and Ariel Durant.

This long, almost picaresque sentence — through which an author rides picaro like — works for many writers as a correspondence to the complexity, confusion, even sheer tawdryness of modern society. When a writer talks about Walt Whitman this way —

Walt Whitman, born on Paumanok (that is: Long Island), saw in that island's shape (understandably, when you look at the map) the fish that, in the context of Western-Christian iconography, equals Christ equals rebirth equals, especially for Whitman, messianic connotations and (given Whitman's translation of biographical events and conditions into transcendental mythological patterns) therefore portends for me, "I, Walt Whitman" (to be born later, again, with the writing of Leaves of Grass) a divine dimension and a capacity for illuminating the masses who, though they never read him, remained always his projected audience, and revealing, to the enshrined (more than the "slaves," of course; all of us at one time or another) a certain kind of liberation, freedom, escape from the prison.

— he is suggesting, via style, the entanglement environment in which the masses and the enslaved live and are living and from which Whitman sought to rescue.

In contrast with this kind of labyrinthine sentence but often its companion (à la Quixote and Panza), the sentence fragment — frequently a single word or a very short phrase of only two or three words — suggests a far greater awareness of separation and fragmentation: not entanglement but isolation. It is also a highly emphatic kind of sentence and, in conjunction with other sentence types, creates a variegated,
Grant or Rutherford B. Hayes.  

Jump. Once for all. With the praising of. Once for all.  
At a chance. To win.  
Once for all. With a chance. To win.  

The farther reach of sentence types in the alternate grammar of style provides the writer with a much greater number of options. He can write the crows of the alternate grammar (a) in the traditional sentence types, (b) in the labyrinthine sentence, (c) in sentence fragments, or (d) in combinations of (i) traditional sentences and sentence fragments or (ii.) labyrinthine sentences and sentence fragments.  

The Litt. To create a list, a writer presents a series of items, usually removed from sentence structure or at least very independent of such structure. Usually a list contains a minimum of five items, the items being related in subject matter but presented in list form to avoid indicating any other relationship among the items than that they are all there at once, that they are parts of the whole. Presenting a list of items is comparable to presenting a "still life" of objects without indication of foreground or background, without any indication of relative importance, without any suggestion at all of cause-effect, this-before-that, rank, or the like. Obviously the items on the list must be presented one first, one second, one third — but the sequence is generally arbitrary and meaningless.  

Adapted from the plethora series found in traditional grammar of style, and antedated by "catalogues" such as appear in Whitman's poem, the list stands in stark simplicity — a list of objects, observations, or what have you — to give a quick representation of a character, a situation, a place by the simple device of selecting items to represent the subject under discussion. Donald Barthelme, a frequent user of lists, can range — as he does in a short story, "City Life," from a list dealing with television viewing ("On 7 there's 'Johnny Allegro' with George Raft and Nina Foch. On 9 'Johnny Angel' with George Raft and Claire Trevor." all the way through a total of eight variations to the final "On 31 is 'Johnny Trouble' with Stuart Whitman and Ethel Barrymore") to a "list" description of a wedding with such items as "Elsa and Jacques bombarded with flowers" to "The minister raises his hand" to such a simple item as "Champagne."  

Though lists may be presented in a straight reading line, they are usually presented in columnar form, the items arranged typographically one beneath the other just as one writes a grocery list.  

One of the attractions of the list to the contemporary writer is that disregarding the fact that bias may have entered into the selection of the items in the first place — the list is basically a presentation of items without commentary, seeming to say, "Consider these items without any help from the writer. The writer is keeping his mouth shut. He is simply giving you the data, the evidence, the facts, the objects. You, the reader, must add them up and evaluate them." Or there is the suggestion that there are no "values" at all that can be imposed upon the list, that reality stands before us neutral, amoral, and that if we do impose values upon a list it is an arbitrary act upon our part.  

Whereas in the traditional grammar of style, one might write —  

Whitman grew up as a boy on Long Island, absorbing all the images of sea and sky and shore, all the images of the pastoral world that were always to be a part of his poetry even as he later celebrated the urban glories of Manhattan.  

— in the alternate grammar one might well write —  

Whitman grew up as a boy on Long Island.  
Sea.  
Gulls.  
Sky.  
Shore.  
Roses.  
Salt air.  
Tides.  
Farms.  
Dusty Roads.  
Mockingbirds.  
Horses.  
Summer Clouds.  

The difference between the two is not a matter of "quality," but is a matter of differing effects, differing reader involvement, differing authorial voice. One is no more creative than the other; one is no more fictional than the other.  

Double-Voice. Even in nonfiction, as in fiction, a writer speaks with a "voice" — if not always the same voice in all his writing, certainly a given voice in a given composition. Indeed, the creation of "voice" is one of the tasks of "style," and the traditional grammar of style has always been used for that purpose among others. In the alternate grammar, however, voice is not always considered a singular characteristic, but often enough a plural characteristic — not a surprising consideration in an age of stereophonics and multi-media dispositions in general.  

Writers use double-voice many times when they feel that they could say this or that about a subject; when they feel that two attitudes toward a subject are equally valid; when they wish to suggest that there are two sides to the story (whatever the story may be); when they wish to distinguish between their roles as (a) provider of information and data, and (b) commentator upon information and data; or when they wish to effect a style "corresponding" to ambiguous realities.  

The double-voice may be presented in straight-line form —  

Whitman was born on Long Island in 1819. Are island children marked for a certain sense of individuality, or separation? He was the Whitmans' second child. Do "second" children make a greater struggle for identity than the oldest or the youngest? Whitman moved with his parents to Brooklyn when he was four years old. Have children, by the age of four, absorbed most of their primary images, established their essential attitudes and feelings toward life regardless where they move?  

Straight-line presentation of double-voice is what John Barth uses, for instance, in 'Lost in the Funhouse': one
example occurs in the opening paragraph of the story:

For Ambrose it is a place of fear and confusion. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America. A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italics which in turn is the printed equivalent to . . .

The shift of voice that comes with the words “A single straight underline” provides Barth with a way of writing both as story-teller and as “observer” of the story-teller.

Obviously, one effective way for writers to present double-voice is to present parallel passages in column form, simply running two tracks of composition down the page, side by side. John Cage does this often enough, notably in his essay on “Erik Satie,” in Silence (Wesleyan University Press, 1961; M.T.T. Press, 1966). In this essay Cage alternates two voices, one indicated by a dot or dash to the left of the page, the other by roman type to the right of the page. In another essay, “Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?” Cage sets up double-voice, at times even triple-voice, by writing his way —

The candles at the Candlelight Concert are One New Year's Eve I had too electric. It was found dangerous many invitations. I decided to for them to be wax. It has not yet and so forth.

By far, though, the standard way of presenting double-voice is simply to present the columns without any further complications:

Whitman was born in 1819 on Long Island. When he was four, his parents moved to Brooklyn where Whitman grew up and went to school. All his youth he spent, one place or another, in town or in country, between East River and the Atlantic Ocean.

And obviously, two lists can run parallel to each other — doing all that lists themselves do and at the same time creating the double-voice:

Sea
Gulls
Sky
Shore
Stones
Roses
Salt Air
Tides
Farms
Country Roads
Mockingbirds
Horses
Summer Clouds

Atlantic/Womb & Tomb/Such Mystery Arcs of whiteness/plaintive screams Endless/one should not stare into space too long a time Boundaries/the line between Foundation & Crushing Force Perfume & Thorn Wake me up! Sting against my face! Of blood Pastoral themes/dirty labor in barns Delicate tracks/muddy ruts Music & Irony I stare into their eyes & wonder about the universe.

We are born by accident in a certain location, yet the location impinges upon our soul and psyche, and we absorb the sounds and sights peculiar to that location and our view of reality is constructed from this primary, childhood material.

(Woof, that's quite different from ordinary epiphanies. Likewise, her repetition of the word “pancake” in this sentence —

Then there used to be so many kinds of pancakes, every kind of pancake, that too has disappeared the pancake has pretty well disappeared and I imagine that there are lots of little Americans who have never even heard of them never even heard of the word pancake. (Haas, ed., Gertrude Stein, op. cit.)

The efforts of a Stein or a Woolf are simply preludes to the full use of repetition that we find in full-blown examples of the alternate grammar. When we come to Tom Wolfe's essay “Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can’t Hear you! Too Noisy!) Las Vegas!!!” we find him opening with a tremendously exaggerated super-epiphany, repeating the word “hernia” thirty times in a row, then — after a slight interruption for the phrase “eight is the point, the point is eight” — repeating the word “hernia” another seven times, pausing for the phrase “hard eight,” then finishing out the opening paragraph with another sixteen “hernia”s.

Wolfe’s repetition in this case suggests movement and energy, and probably most repetitions, when presented in
tightly concentrated form this way, are “corresponding” to a
certain “throb of life.” Sometimes, though, repetitions are
less concentrated, more scattered — as in this passage from
John Dos Passos’ U.S.A.

Thomas A. Edison at eighty-two worked sixteen
hours a day; he never worried about mathematics or the
social system or generalized philosophical concepts; in
collaboration with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone
who never worried about mathematics or the social
system or generalized philosophical concepts;
he worked sixteen hours a day trying to find a substi-
tute for rubber; whenever he read about anything he
tried it out; whenever he got a hunch he went to the
laboratory and tried it out.

In such repetition the correspondence is probably more with
the idea of inevitable recurrence of experience, the “same-
ter” and “inevitability” of reality, a recognition that in reality
there are both stabilizing “things we count on” and boring
things that never go away. Different writers will find different
values in the repetition, some writers using it sparingly but
some writers creating, with it, a great sense of saturation and
density. Once again, the writer has options.

Given such stylistic maneuvers and devices as these (there
are many more, of course — including the many that are
shared with traditional grammar and including more excep-
tional devices absolutely beyond the pale of traditional
grammar, e.g. the non sequitur and the mixed metaphor) the
contemporary writer can mix and match as his own composi-
tional inclinations and rhetorical commitments determine.
He may, in his use of such maneuvers and devices, achieve, as
he often does, two stylistic effects quite characteristic of
compositions in the alternate grammar. They are the effects of
(a) synchronicity and (b) collage/monotage.

Synchronicity. In the traditional grammar of style all “time”
considerations are diachronic or chronological. Even the
devices of “foreshadowing” and “flashback” are still part of a
diachronic conceptualization. In the alternate grammar,
however, there is an acceptance of “all things present in
the present moment” with many of the devices already men-
tioned implying this effect: double-voice implies a certain
simulateness in reality; two things going on at once.
Repetitions/repeats/repeats also imply recurrence; certain
material occurs in the composition; one reads it and passes
on, assuming those words to be in the “past” of the composi-
tion — yet we meet the material again; it was not a
prisoner of the “past” but is present now, the same as it was,
transcending a past/present/future sequence.

If the desire of the writer is to suggest synchronicity, he can
indeed make use of double-voice and repetition. He can
make use of the double-column list. He can make use of the
labyrinthine sentence, especially when it emphasizes circular-
ity (borrowing epanalepsis from the traditional grammar and
making heavy, exaggerated use of it).

Much use is made also of the present tense to achieve
synchronicity since the present tense can equal both the real
present and the historical present; without moving from one
another, synchronicity can be created — as in such a
passage as this —

Whitman is crossing East River on the Brooklyn Ferry.
A woman is giving birth on a farm on Long Island on the
thirty-first of May. He observes the reflections in the
water. Whitman is dying in Camden. Peter Doyle con-
ducts the trolley through the broad streets of
Washington and the old man stares out the window,
stares at the American people. The woman calls her
second child Walter. And crossing on the ferry with him
are all types of people, all the diverse faces, all the
diverse parts of the American whole. So he walks
through Camden. So he walks through Washington,
D.C. He climbs up on the trolley and visits with Peter

Doyle. He shortens his name to Walt. He tells his
mother he is going to cross on the ferry, make his way to
Manhattan, he has things to say. Thus: Whitman is born
on Paumanok, 1819. Thus he is dying, carefully, in
the spring of 1892. He is making a kind of journey through
the flow of people and across the broad ocean.

(Note: In synchronicity, use is often made of transitional
and relating words—such as “so,” “therefore,” “thus,” “then” —
in a kind of “binding of time” resembling the traditional
grammar of style wherein transition/relationship is accepted
and expected. The resulting non-sequiturs are a by-product,
yet become an important characteristic of the alternate
grammar, since the non-sequiturs cut through old logical
patterns and question the validity of old connections.)

Synchronicity is often achieved simply through the
scrabbling of sentences or paragraphs or crazy, scrambling
them out of ordinary time sequences, so that one keeps
encountering them again and again in a certain time period.
For instance, if one had crots dealing with (a) one’s arrival
in New Orleans, (b) one’s visit to the French Quarter, (c)
in particular one’s dining at Antoine’s, and (d) one’s departure
from New Orleans, synchronicity would be achieved by
scrabbling the crots to present: now one from group b, now
one from group c, now one from group a, now one from
group b, now one from group d, now one from group c, now
one from group d. Even if the individual crots use ap-
propriate verb tenses (pawt tessential primarily, with some past
perfect) still the effect of the scrabbling would be synchronic
— all events indistinguishable within one large time frame.

Synchronicity is, of course, a stylistic effect used to support
a writer’s concern with the “here and now,” the contempo-
rary. Synchronicity also allows the writer to concentrate upon
the immediate moment and yet include matter from the past
without having to compromise the discussion of the present.
If, in the opinion of a writer, the only reality is what stands in
front of him here and now, then his knowledge of the past is
best presented in present terms. With appreciative nods to
ward such a history theorist as R. G. Collingwood, the writer
conceives his very “knowledge of the past” as a current
knowledge: knowledge in the present of the past is a syn-
chronous situation. All in all, synchronicity provides stylistic
correspondence to the “timelessness of events.”

Collage/monotage. Another frequent effect of the alternate
grammar is collage/monotage in which diverse elements are
patched together to make the whole composition. Easily
achieved with crots and the other stylistic devices so far
identified, collage/monotage reacts against the “categorizing”
of traditional grammar and insists on packaging together into
a heterogenous community all those matters that in tradi-
tional grammar would be grouped into homogeneous units.
Quite compatible with and similar to synchronicity, the
collage/monotage effect (which in traditional grammar would
be considered random, hodge-podge, patchwork) is a stylistic
effort at synthesis, distinguishable from traditional grammar’s
effect, nearly always, at analysis.

In extreme form, collage/monotage can mean something as
radical as William Burroughs’s famous cut-up method,
whereby texts written in traditional grammar are cut up, hori-
izontally and vertically, and converted into near-
unintelligible scraps of text. The scraps are then shuffled (or
folded in) and joined randomly. Sometimes Burroughs car-
ries his cut-up method so far as to cut up individual sentences
into fragments, then paste the fragments back into new sen-
tences. He does this for instance in A Distain Hand Lifted,
wherein a typical sequence reads: “... remember/my
messages between remote posts of/expanded starfield in
... distant sky/example agent K9 types out asistant hand
lifted...” Burroughs says this collage “method can approx-
imate walky talky immediacy.”

Less radical, and more useable, are methods of collage that
use larger and more intelligible units of composition, each
unit—like the crot—communicative within itself, simply being joined in the collage to other communication units, perhaps from different time periods, perhaps dealing with different subject matter, perhaps even containing different sentence/dictional style, texture, tone. Collage at its best actually counters much of the discontinuity and fragmentation of the alternate style by revealing, by the time a composition ends, a synthesis and a wholeness that might not have been suspected at any station along the way.

As the compositional units to be "synthesized" become larger, more substantial, and more complete within themselves, we come to the sense of montage—a presentation in sequence, side by side, of compositional units less fragmental, yet fairly disparate to the extent of form or content are concerned. Frequently the disparate units are actually examples of various established compositional forms—e.g., poem, aphorism, letter, description, narration, anecdote, interview, questionaire, etc. William Blake achieved such a montage effect in the preface to the various chapters of *Jerusalem*: in the preface to the first chapter, for instance, he presents (a) a prose apologia for the writing of *Jerusalem*, (b) a verse apologia and address to readers, (c) a verse quatrains, (d) a brief prose philosophical essay, (e) a thirty-five line poem in a rough kind of iambic pentameter, (f) a three-stanza hymn-like poem made up of four-lined stanzas in generally rhymed tetrameters.

In current montage effects, writers create multi-genre compositions, using as Dylan Thomas does, for instance, in his essay "Reminiscences of Childhood," a sequence of (a) description, (b) an original poem, (c) more prose description containing (d) passages of dialogue, and ending with (e) an aphoristic-like statement, "The memories of childhood have no order, and no end."

This kind of multi-genre montage effect in the alternate grammar replaces, somewhat, the more traditional method of citation and quotation, though quotations themselves—in isolated forms—are often used in montage.

The use of various genres within the prose nonfiction composition—e.g., the "mimeographed schedule" in Terry Southern's "Twirling at Ole Miss"; the dramatic "scene" complete with dialogue, along with song lyrics and individual "testimonial" statements by Frank Sinatra's family in Gay Talese's "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"; tape transcripts of earth-to-moon conversations in Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*—is valued by contemporary writers because it suggests that there is little difference between genres, between fiction/nonfiction in the verbal response to reality, that the category lines separating "literary forms" in the traditional areas do not really make sense if we begin to perceive reality and the verbal response to that reality in new and different ways. Hence: Norman Mailer's *The Armistice of the Night*: History as a Novel, *The Novel as History*; Truman Capote's nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood*.

5.

Other devices/maneuvers are available in the alternate grammar, of course, but these are the most frequently encountered, I believe. The manipulation of these devices/maneuvers ranges from high/ornate styles to low/plain styles, and writers working in the alternate grammar have at great a range of options as do writers working within the traditional grammar. Obviously, writers working both grammars have the greatest range of all.

Compositions achieved through the alternate grammar—with its devices/maneuvers and effects—will obviously be fairly open-ended in structure. That is, they will have less well-defined beginnings and endings, the composition being, as to quote Baudelaire's "a work of which one could not say without perhaps feeling that it has neither head nor tail, for, on the contrary, everything in it is both head and tail, alternately and reciprocally." Compositions in the alternate grammar more frequently open "in medias res" and more frequently come to an abrupt stop without any well-controlled closure. The endings also have a tendency to refer back to the beginning, à la the opening and closing sentences of Joyce's *Ulysses*, creating the circularity that often accompanies synchronicity and montage/collage.

Compositions in the alternate grammar may be of any length, of course, but there is greater tolerance for the short piece, since the "grammar" is not as committed to the traditional forms of development. The whole composition can be, in effect, a single statement, a single observation—and can be made rather quickly. Large, full-length works—such as complete books—that are written in the alternate grammar have a tendency to "break down" into parts, each chapter having its own compositional quality, with some chapters even being written in traditional grammar, other chapters being very noticeably in the alternate grammar: e.g., Robert M. Pirsig's autobiographical work, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*.

Within the alternate grammar, writers adhere, of course, to certain basic principles of composition: (1) The writer commits himself to one grammar or the other early in a composition, and once he has asked his reader to accept one grammar or the other, the writer must not "switch" on the reader; (2) Even though a writer is working within a grammar of discontinuity and fragmentation and even randomness, he must still be concerned with a rationale for his composition, a rationale that informs the composition, if not with "order and sense," then certainly with "interest and effectiveness" in a kind of drama imperative; no composition in any grammar should exist for "no reason" even if "reason" is not part of the grammar; (3) A writer in the alternate grammar of style must be especially concerned not to bore his reader, and therefore he—far more than the writer in traditional grammar—must be concerned with variation, variation; (4) A writer in the alternate grammar must always distinguish between those devices/maneuvers that have already achieved the status of convention and those that are yet experimental; even in the alternate grammar, a writer needs to have "agreement" with his audiences about devices/maneuvers; indeed one of the main points to be made is that the devices/maneuvers we have just cited have left the realm of experimentation and now exist as viable conventions, with a sizeable enough audience prepared to read them and understand them.

6.

But can the alternate grammar be used in our world, in the everyday writing class, on the college campus, for any sort of serious, academic communication? That's what we must find out. We are at the point of discovering if we as teachers of composition can now "enter the act" and bring the alternate grammar into the classroom, make it "legitimate" in academe. What we write, what we teach our students to write, in the alternate grammar will be different, of course. And the question is: is the difference worth the effort of trying new tricks, new ways of writing? What can we really produce in the alternate grammar?

Well, I'll volunteer to go first. And here is a "demonstration" essay that uses some of the devices/maneuvers of the alternate grammar and manifests (even if I've done the exercise poorly) some of the characteristics of the grammar.

An Elementary Essay on William Blake's "The Tyger"

Blake's "The Tyger" (1794)/What are its sources? Some real tiger in the zoo? George Stubbs's animal drawings? Mediaeval bestiaries? Some psychological beast within?

There are no definite answers.

Man is a zoo and within the zoo are the animals of the mind/
Later in Blake there are four: now in Songs of Innocence and of Experience there are two:

Lamb
Gentleness
Sacrifice
Receivability
Innocence
Child

Tyger
Anger
Authority
Aggression
Experience
Adult

Yet all is God: God is the mind of man: God is the full range of man's mind: God is the Lamb and the Tyger.

So Blake asks the question: Why both things? Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Thus God makes himself; he makes himself in two parts (later in four parts) and Blake ponders the question why is it that way? Why are there such things as

Simple
words
that
everyone
can
read
and
understand

Complex locutions that
present us with semantic
puzzles (riddles/enigmas) which
even though emanating from man's
mind defy man's mind going
words into their own logomachia,
armies of abstractions: confounding, obscuring, confusing . . .

words that take arms against a
sea . . .

So Blake writes down the question. Shewing the two contrary states of the human soul. His poem is full of the tyger.

There are no answers.

Blake draws a very gentle pussy-cat and paints it with stripes and puts a grin on its face. Is Blake amused?

Is God amused? Is it all a cosmic joke?

That is another question altogether/entirely. Just as no one knows where the tiger came from, one question leads to another. That's what "The Tyger" is all about: The generation of unanswerable questions: The texture of human experience.

7.

Not that exercise — or anything like it — will ever be published in PMLA or any other academic journal: I understand that. But I also understand that in writing the essay in Grammar B I felt a freedom to comment on Blake's poem that I would not have felt in Grammar A; in fact, I would never have attempted to say such disparate things about the poem in Grammar A. I also discovered that in "gathering my thoughts" and making my "notes," I felt — between the act of invention and the final act of composition — far less distance than I frequently have felt between invention/composition while using Grammar A. Indeed, I'm convinced that many of us in the academic world linger over our research and our studies, delaying the writing of articles and essays, because we are inwardly, unconsciously resisting having to transform our material into the forms dictated by Grammar A. And I also realized, in writing my Grammar B essay, that while I was losing audiences on one side, I might as well be making myself accessible to audiences on another. I'm convinced that vast quantities of critical/scholarly articles and essays are ignored by many intelligent, perceptive persons who can tolerate only so many articles/essays in Grammar A in any given year.

Finally I found a refreshing and exciting experience for myself in trying to demonstrate the devices/maneuvers of Grammar B, in discovering which ones might work for me, in discovering what I might be able to do with them.

8.

But, dear sir, do you not realize that such stylistic maneuvers and devices are ultimately subversive? Surely you jest when you suggest that discontinuity and fragmentation and non sequiturs and mixed metaphors have any place whatever in American composition. Good writing is a discipline (in case you don't know) and discipline means order, continuity, logical development, and complete sentences! I am appalled with the whole idea of an alternate grammar of style. Yours very truly, Professor A.B.

Dear Professor A.B. You haven't been listening. No one is suggesting that we do away with continuity, order, good paragraph development, or complete sentences. It's not a matter of elimination. It's a matter of increasing the possibilities and the options.

Dear Sir: I see no place whatsoever for such a stupid device as a "list" in serious academic writing.

Dear Madame: I admit that few academic audiences today are prepared to accept the full range of devices available in the alternate grammar of style. But the day may come.

Dear Professor W: This all sounds like creative writing to me, and I don't think we could do much with all these maneuvers and devices in a regular English class. Not at my college at least. We teach research papers and things like that.

Dear Professor K: A traditional grammar of style for research papers. An alternate grammar of style for other forms of composition. Is there anything wrong with that? And I might argue, of course, that nothing is more "creative" or "imaginative" than the imposition of "order" upon our thoughts—as we are prone to do in the traditional grammar. Order is a wonderful achievement, but isn't it a creative achievement of the human mind?

If you think, fellow, I'm going to teach my students to write like Donald Barthelme you're crazy.

I don't believe it's a matter of teaching anyone to write like Barthelme or Brautigan or write like Joyce or write like D. H. Lawrence. It's a matter of: catching sight of a student's catching sight of something in Barthelme, Joyce, Lawrence that a wel/a student can incorporate into composition, into more flexible communication.

Ideally, I think we should actually teach the alternate grammar alongside the traditional grammar, giving the student the whole story of contemporary composition. I think we should simply posit, at the beginning of our instruction, the full range of styles available in both grammars, and use the two grammars tandemly, revealing the virtues of one by comparison with the other, revealing to the student how nearly everything he is able to do in writing has its place in some sort of composition or other.

Even if we believe our commitment to the traditional grammar is so strong that we must give our full time to teaching it, we should at least acknowledge the alternate grammar. Say something about it. Point out its existence. Even if we exclude it from our daily work in the classroom. Even if we say to the student, "We can't deal with such matters here in Freshman English" and tell him he must wait until he takes advanced writing or creative writing before he can try such things, we will at least have been honest with him and not left him with the impression that traditional grammar is all there is. We can at least avoid, in our profession, the conspiracy of silence that is tantamount to restriction and suppression.

The important thing is that we, as teachers, know that what we usually teach in freshman English is but "part of a whole" and that we are dealing only with one area of composition.

The important thing is that we, as teachers, know about the larger context of composition in which our particular, specialized instruction is taking place. And if our own orientations are liberal and open, I think we will perhaps open up for ourselves a whole new attitude toward the evaluation and grading and marking of the ordinary freshman papers that appear before us.
To the Editor on “From the Editor,”

I know the editor of Freshman English News to be a straight-shooter. That’s why I was surprised to see him take three cheap shots in his Fall 1975 editorial column for PEN, taking NCTE to task for publishing Ideas for Teaching English 101.

Cheap Shot No. 1: to base a review of a book on its table of contents. (Having done that is not as cheap as it might have been, since he admits he did it. But perhaps his admitted inability to understand the organization of the book stems from the fact that he had read neither the book itself nor even the editors’ introduction.)

Cheap Shot No. 2: to fault a collection of articles for not including pieces he would have included had he been editor (including one from College English for February 1975, well past the conceivable submission date for spring 1975 publication. The editor knows enough about book publishing to understand that there was no possibility of including that piece.)

Cheap Shot No. 3: to imply the need, if not actually to call for an organization-wide protest in a non-organizational organ (i.e., PEN) on the grounds that NCTE was planning to publish a work that the editor had not seen but was sure he wouldn’t like. (I guess I would feel this shot less cheap if it had appeared in College Composition and Communication; not at all cheap in College English.)

Now then, to what really happened...

At the suggestion of a member, the editor of College English wrote the NCTE Director of Publications a modest proposal: over the past ten years College English had published a variety of articles that might be of interest and use to those teaching college composition or to those supervising or directing the work of such teachers. The editor wondered whether NCTE might want to publish in a single volume a collection of such articles. The Director of Publications asked for a prospectus that the NCTE Editorial Board might consider. The editor supplied such a prospectus and the chairs of the College Section and the Editorial Board, after suggesting their own favorite pieces, said go ahead and make your own selection from the experience of your own editorship.

The prospectus consisted of a series of articles written by college and university teachers about teaching writing at the college level and was addressed to others who shared that intent. The field of articles was open but manageable, and the authors and the intended audience were in logical fit.

The Board also suggested the possibility of selecting from the considerable corpus of articles published in College Composition and Communication. The editors of Ideas for English 101 were perfectly amenable to that suggestion, but felt tokenism would not be enough. They would have sought as a coeditor the present or the immediate past editor of CCC. But time was passing and we hoped to have the book out in time for CCC last spring. In the meantime, moreover, we learned that if we confined the collection to CE articles, we could manufacture a book without going back to original type-setting. The variety of typographical formats in CE alone posed a problem in book design, but we were able to solve it satisfactorily without resetting type. To have included articles from CCC and other journals as well would have made the cost of total typesetting inevitable. Apart from slowing things down, it would have meant an estimated net increase of $1 per book in production costs and probably more than that in the list price.

But the differences in typographical format are just the
The Editor Replies:

If our revisionist historians are correct, "straight-shooters" often took cheap shots—but they seldom missed. (I'd like to play around with Robert Hogan's metaphor for a while, but shooting is serious business so I'll get right to the point.)

My Cheap Shot No. 1: I did not review *Ideas for Teaching English 101* on the basis of just a table of contents. When Paul O'Dea sent me the table of contents, he marked the publication date of each *College English* article that was to be reprinted. Therefore, I had only to go to my back files of the journal to "have the book before me." The only thing missing was the editors' introduction, but now that I've seen it, I am not enlightened in the way that Hogan suggests.

My Cheap Shot No. 2: It seems to me to be perfectly legitimate to criticize a book by suggesting how it might have been made better by the inclusion of other articles. (My comment about the absence of the Halloran article was a result of my not knowing how efficient NCTE is when it puts together a book of articles from only one of its journals.)

My Cheap Shot No. 3: I guess I don't know the rules of the game. I was unaware that NCTE publications are not to be criticized by non-NCTE publications. As for my "call for an organization-wide protest," I think the careful reader will understand that I was not issuing any such call. I alone was protesting the publication of the book, not calling on others to do so. I merely took the occasion to suggest what I still believe: that we are all obligated to protest when any professional organization falls short of the best it can do. The key sentence in my editorial is, "It seems to me that a larger question is raised by all that I have said." I then go on to mention not only NCTE, but MLA and CEA. In a letter to me, Hogan refers to my using the "rhetoric of the caucus." I would prefer to think of it as the rhetoric of involvement. And I would add that my concept of the right to protest also involves an obligation of prior support and participation.

Finally, Hogan's comment about the "clear sense of audience" that would have been "obliterated" had articles from other NCTE journals been reprinted is puzzling, suggesting as it does that those who read articles about the teaching of writing in *CE* are a different group from those who read articles about the teaching of writing in *CCC, Research in the Teaching of English, English Education, English Journal,* and even *Language Arts.* The good composition teachers I know read at least most of these journals. I fail to see, therefore, what is so special about those who read *CE.*

Hogan's description of how the book came to be only underlines my question about the rush into print that seemed to be such a significant factor in the project. I could also speculate about how many of us would have been willing to pay a dollar more for a better book. But I'll end as Hogan does—by urging readers of *FEN* to examine the book and draw their own conclusions. And maybe, as Hogan suggests, one of you will send the NCTE Editorial Board a prospectus for a better book. It wouldn't be hard.

G. T.