As we move on to a discussion of oral history itself, using not only professional examples but also student-conducted interviews that I have collected, we continue examining the texts for elements that make them interesting and immediate, believable and “real.” In oral history, this “realism” is established not just by content (opinions and emotions strongly expressed; thorough detail, including trivia; informal quoting of others), but by style as well — by the rhythms of natural speech, by slang, and by the spontaneity of free association, digressions, false starts, and interjections.

The next step in the process of writing an oral history biography is a workshop class period, which helps students understand what kinds of questions to ask their subjects. The class is divided into five groups of four, with each group assigned (for the duration of the class session only) to focus on one stage of life: childhood, adolescence, marriage and parenthood, work and retirement and old age. In about twenty minutes, each group prepares a list of ten possible questions about the period. When the questions have been compiled, a spokesperson from each group reads them to the class, and the students evaluate their effectiveness, making note of any questions they might want to use in their own interviews. As the questions are presented, students are encouraged to rephrase them when necessary to avoid vague, dead end and yes/no questions, or embarrassingly prying ones; they are reminded to follow up where their subject seems interested. I also ask them to consider at all times the impact of outside events — wars, changing morals, economic conditions — upon their subject.

This is the assignment I give my class: “Interview an adult friend or relative, focusing on one narrow stage — perhaps one event — of his or her life. Do not use a tape recorder. Write up an oral history interview from your notes, capturing the tone and flavor of the subject’s personal voice.” Although I have explained that oral history is a scholarly discipline, a systematic collection of interviews intended to be used as a research tool by future scholars, I do not expect this of my students’ interviews. Each interview should, however, include a short introduction to provide a historical context, and an explanation of any unfamiliar terms or extenuating circumstances. (One elderly subject, for instance, kept dozing off; another was hard of hearing.) Each should also include questions as well as answers.

The assignment asks a great deal of the students. They must familiarize themselves with the subject’s background; formulate and pose provocative questions; record answers and contexts accurately; ask spontaneous questions to follow up or clarify important points; evaluate the information received, sometimes rejecting irrelevant or repetitive material; and logically organize detail to place emphasis where it belongs. The interviewer must then review the material to see if any important information is missing, and perhaps go back to ask questions to fill in the gaps. Then the student must decide where in the text this additional material should go. Finally, the student interviewer is responsible for careful editing, paying particular attention to paragraphing and spelling, which are, of course, not supplied by the subject.

This oral history project regularly generates more ques-
tions of me, and more interest and discussion among students, than any other I've tried. The subjects of the finished interviews represent a wide range of ages and nationalities, social classes and occupations, and their reminiscences are often transformed into well-organized, thoughtfully presented papers. The students enjoy writing them, and we all enjoy reading them. In the course of planning, conducting, and writing up their interviews, they practice many of the writing and study skills they need to know, and develop a real appreciation for the kind of work that goes into seemingly effortless fact-based writing. And, as they are exposed to the uniquely interesting lives of people they may have been taking for granted — like their parents — they come to see similar interest and value, pattern and logic, in their own lives, and in their own writing about themselves.

Coaching Writing

Ken Davis
University of Kentucky

English 101 at the University of Kentucky has traditionally employed textbook assignments, in-class discussion, and take-home themes. Recently, however, we have offered a number of “workshop” sections of the course, with few reading assignments, with most writing done in class, and with extensive one-to-one interaction between teachers and students. The instructors for these sections — all our new, inexperienced Teaching Assistants, as well as a few experienced volunteers — have been redesignated "writing coaches."

The term "coaching" for the teaching of composition comes (to me, at least) from James Moffett, in his article "Learning to Write by Writing." Moffett contends that "writing is learned in the same basic way other activities are learned — by doing and by heeding what happens." Some of this "heeding what happens" — or feedback — comes from the learner's own perception of what he has done: the bicycle falls over, the notes are rushed, the ball goes over the head of the receiver, and so on. The learner needs this information and adjusts his next trial accordingly." But, says Moffett, suppose the learner cannot perceive what he is doing — does not, for example, hear that the notes are rushed — or perceives that he has fallen short of his goal but does not know what adjustment to make in his action. This is where the coach comes in. He is someone who observes the learner's actions and the results, and points out what the learner cannot see for himself. He is a human source of feedback who supplements the feedback from inanimate things. (pp. 188-89)

I invite, therefore, the composition instructor to think of herself not as a "teacher" but as a "coach" — not only in the sense of a football or swimming coach, but also in the sense of a voice or drama or childbirth coach. The metaphor is productive, I think, for several reasons.

First, coaching is performance-oriented; the coach succeeds only as those he is coaching succeed. "Teaching," on the other hand, is often dichotomized against "learning," as if it were possible for the first to occur without the second. Barry Commoner, the biologist and environmentalist, notes that "when you try to get graduate students to understand how to teach, they start by thinking that teaching consists of filling themselves with knowledge and then putting it out. After that, they may notice that there's somebody out here listening and, long after that, they'll notice that there's some response." Closer to home, a Kentucky teaching assistant objected to a question on a student evaluation form which asked "How well did this course help you improve your writing?" "What if I taught well," he asked me, "but my students didn't learn from it?"

Every real coach knows that the teaching-learning enterprise is a shared one; a track coach who argued "I coached well, but the team didn't learn from it" would soon find herself out of a job. Her mistake would be the same as that of the traditional writing teacher, as described by John Warnock, who derives comfort from the "truth" that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink: To "lead" he must only "present" his subject in terms of its own internal logic and organization. Teaching is his job, he says; learning is the student's job. And when the horses don't drink, we know whose fault it is.

But as Warnock argues, if one has decided that a horse needs to take a drink, one can, of course, with time, do a great deal to increase the probabilities that he will do so, and if one values the horse, he will probably do those things.

A second strength of the coaching metaphor is that it keeps us aware, in poet Robert Creeley's words, that "writing is an activity, not a subject." Too often we substitute, in our classrooms, teaching about composition for teaching composition. No basketball coach lectures and holds discussions on the theory of basketball, then stays away from the gym while his team practices. Yet most writing teachers do just that — preteaching (to use Moffett's term) the theory of composition, then sending their students off to practice on their own. There are, to be sure, courses in basketball theory, but these are, at least on paper, courses for prospective coaches, analogous to our graduate rhetoric courses. Moffett argues that "a lot of what is in textbooks should be in books for teachers." (Discourse, p. 209)
Wilbur Hatfield's 1935 NCTE report, *An Experience Curriculum in English* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co.) took as one of its theses that "the art of communication can be mastered only through experience in actual, normal communication," (p. 133) but few composition teachers in the years since have embraced that conviction. Moffett has been in the minority, I suspect, in asserting that "the most natural assumption about teaching any symbol system should be that the student employ his time using that system in every realistic way that it can be used, not that he analyze it or study it as an object." (Discourse, p. 17)

Donald M. Murray elaborates on this point. I quote him at some length because he captures, in a couple of paragraphs, the essential contrast between "workshop" and conventional methods of teaching writing:

Writing is a skill, or an art, and, therefore, the composition course is a laboratory or workshop course. You can't learn to write by reading before the fact, by discussion before the fact, by critical analysis after the fact, or by lecture before or after the fact of writing. These are all valid teaching techniques, part of the writing teacher's arsenal. But the emphasis in the course must be on what the student is doing, for writing simply cannot be taught theoretically, in the abstract. Writing must be experienced to be learned.

The teaching role in which the teacher responds instead of initiating does not threaten the status of the shop teacher, the art teacher, the music teacher, the science lab teacher or the football coach. But it does seem to frighten and threaten the English teacher who too often envisions himself as a modern Moses who brings the tablets, possibly sexed for class distribution, down from the mountain each day. Still, the absence of such a self-imposed mission, far from being frightening and threatening, can bring the writing teacher a new kind of security, as Louise Tipton, a Kentucky instructor who uses a workshop approach, reports:

Perhaps a telling point can be made with this short anecdote. I talked to a composition teacher who has class next to me... She said the class was going well enough, although some days not much, if anything, was accomplished. Now; I thought to myself, I never have that feeling of nonaccomplishment... [My] students know what they're supposed to be doing, and that is to write.

To summarize this second advantage of "coaching" writing as against "teaching" about writing, I'll return to Warnock's discussion of horses and water. If one wants a horse to drink, Warnock says, "one may be helped... by knowledge of how and why horses come to want to drink and do drink." But, says Warnock, "one does not teach the horse those reasons." (p. 2)

A third reason to think of oneself as a coach, not a teacher, is that coaches give feedback when it is most useful — immediately after the action being coached — not at some later time. We writing teachers, since we're not "at the gym" with our students, rely on written comments, which we make a week or two after the game has been played.

In so doing, we go against one of the few things that can be known with certainty about learning: that feedback, to be most effective, must be given almost immediately. The writing coach in a workshop class takes full advantage of that principle; she gives strong, timely responses, not weak, week-old ones. Her method, as Moffett states, "embodies the safest assumption about learning... whoever assumes anything else bears the burden of proof."

A fourth value of the metaphor of coaching is the assumption made by coaches that their students already have basic knowledge and skills. A college football coach, for example, does not spend time explaining what a goal line, a halfback, or a forward pass is. His players arrive at the first practice session with almost all the knowledge they need to play championship football; the coach's job is to help them refine their skills.

Exactly the same is true of freshman comp students: they arrive at college with almost all the knowledge (certainly well over 99 percent of it) they need to become champion writers. They've had this knowledge, in fact, since before they began kindergarten; they knew, even then, virtually the complete contents of every English grammar book ever written. Since then they've spoken and heard literally millions of sentences, and written and read, at worst, thousands.

Yet too often we treat them as if they don't know a punct from a popcorn vendor; we regard the freshman mind as a tabula rasa on which we write the content of this new subject, composition. Such an image has become almost implicit in the term "teaching." The workshop method discards this assumption. Instead of "teaching" the students what they don't know, the workshop instructor "coaches" them at what they do know. Along the way, students will doubtless learn some of that remaining one percent, but not as their chief goal in the course.

The fifth and, for now, last reason to call writing instructors "coaches" is that, to the beginner at least, coaching is a much less formidable task than teaching. The chief prerequisite for coaching any given skill is experience at that skill oneself. (Nobody, to my knowledge, ever said, "Them that can't, coach."). "Teaching," however, despite the implication of that last parenthesis, carries a certain mystique. For some, perhaps, it calls up an image of the hours of "ed" courses needed for a teacher's certificate; for others the years of experience needed to produce the master lecturer.

Yet every new composition instructor has the background necessary to be a writing coach. As George Stade writes, the teacher of Freshman Composition does not need to know in the abstract or in advance what good writing would be like. He need only, to begin with, recognize bad writing. He need only be like the jazz musician who can play, but not read, music. The musician knows perfectly well when he hits a clamb, as Dizzy Gillespie puts it, even though he may not be able to explain what is fishy about the notes. The teacher, likewise, need only recognize verbal clams when he sees them, need only feel their wrongness, as he need only feel the adequateness of other expressions or their felicity.

Such an approach to the freshman writing course lets the beginning teacher play precisely from her strength, not her weakness. As a beginning Teaching Assistant, I found myself most comfortable, and most competent, in my one-to-one conferences with students; dozens of other new T.A.'s, at Michigan and Kentucky, have told me similar stories. Squire and Applebee, in their landmark study of composition teaching (albeit at the high-school level), recommend
strongly that teachers "look more closely at methods to institute conferences on a more frequent basis than obtains at present, even at the expense of other class activities." That's just what the workshop course does: it increases the frequency of conferences — the part of the job new teachers are best prepared for and best at — from twice a semester to twice a week. Those "other class activities" — lecturing, discussion-leading — have their place, but they require an ability that comes with time — more slowly for some of us than for others. Responding, as a reader, to another's writing is an ability we all start with.

And so do our students. While coaching requires ability at the skill being coached, it does not require superior ability. Presumably Beverly Sills' voice coach does not sing as well as she; if he did, he'd be the star. But he's surely useful to her nonetheless. I'll venture that all of us who teach writing have had students who write better than we do. But we've been valuable to such students, anyway, just as our students can be valuable to each other.

The reasons for peer-coaching are many: it teaches critical reading, it brings a multiple audience to the student's work, it helps demystify the act of writing, it frees the teacher to deal with only the thorniest problems. But the chief reason, perhaps, is the one offered by Janet Emig: peers are "the most significant others" in young peoples' lives. As such, they can bring the most impact to their coaching. Our goal as instructors should be, in the words of Ken Macrorie, "creating a seminar in which students help each other learn the disciplines of the writing craft."

But even though anyone can coach, anyone can also learn to coach better. In fact, it seems to me that a coaching-based course provides the ideal laboratory in which the new composition instructor can perfect his craft. In such a course, the act of "teaching" is reduced to the existential relationship between two people, even if they're not Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and James Garfield on the other. One of my mentors, Stephen Dunning, required each of us in his graduate English-education seminar to tutor a junior-high-age non-reader in reading. None of us, I suppose, planned careers as remedial junior-high reading teachers — most of us aimed for English professorships — but the one-to-one relationship with a child provided us a concrete base on which to build our study of pedagogical abstractions. No one, Professor Dunning said, could call himself a "teacher" until he had experienced being personally responsible for one person's learning. For me, even as a veteran of freshman composition teaching, that responsibility was a new one.

At Kentucky, teaching "Composition for Teachers" to new T.A.'s, I've had my greatest difficulty in balancing theory and practice. On some class days, I've tried to acquaint my students with the best of contemporary rhetorical thought, but my students, concerned with grading yesterday's themes or planning tomorrow's discussion of Chapter 12, have found little application for the theory I'm presenting. Other days we've spent discussing our classroom problems, but these discussions have often lacked substance and lapsed into group commiseration. This year, I was able still (not always successfully, I admit) to present new concepts of composition teaching as tools my graduate students could use the same day in their coaching of individual freshman students. Winter's "grammar of coherence," for example, is meaningful to a new T.A. only if she sees it as something that might help Tom with that organizational problem he's having. In short, I see the workshop approach to English 01 as a way of better meeting not only our department's freshman composition responsibility but also our college-teacher-training responsibility. More important, it seems a way of better integrating both.

NOTES

1. As this is being written, an article, "Writing Coach," has appeared in CCC, 28, pp. 154-58. Its author, David Hamilton, attributes the comparison between composition teaching and coaching to Warner Rice, who reportedly called coaches "the best teachers on any campus."


An Interest Inventory for Topic Discovery

Charles W. Bridges
New Mexico State University

All too often, students begin a writing assignment with feelings of frustration that, at times, border on anger or resentment. These feelings stem from a primary source frequently voiced in this complaint: "I don't know anything to write about." It's a complaint I hear (and have heard) with every assignment my freshmen have (and have had). It's a complaint that has almost limitless variations — e.g., "I don't know anything that would interest anybody." "Nothing's happened to me that I can write about." "I can't ever think of a topic." And, finally, worst of all, "Tell me what to write about." These variations on the no-topic theme point to two conclusions: (1) Students are seemingly unaware of things happening around them that are worth communicating; (2) Students are unaware that they actually do have things in their backgrounds worth communicating.

Questions concerning the term "worth communicating" arise immediately. What is "worth communicating"? Young, Becker, and Pike provide one answer in Rhetoric: Discovery and Change: "... one of the most important [purposes of writing] is to reveal to others one's own image of
The Basics... Comprehensive, multi-purpose P-H texts help students develop a fundamental mastery of Basic English skills.

PROGRAMED COLLEGE VOCABULARY 3600, 2nd Edition
George W. Feinstein—Pasadena City College
Helps students achieve a command of a vocabulary valuable for composition and literature courses. More than 3,600 active student responses are provoked and reinforced by means of simple questions, repetition and quizzes. Students work easily through the programmed chapters that include: a variety of instructional/exercise frames consisting of definitions and examples, and completion statements pertaining to the vocabulary words of the frame, and quizzes and review tests. Introduces students to the terminology of later English classes and includes pronunciation of many more words. New Instructor's Manual available.
1979 304 pp. (est.) Paper $6.95

STEPS IN COMPOSITION, Alternate, 2nd Edition
Lynn Quitman Troyka and Jerrold Nudelman — both of Queensborough Community College, CUNY
Freshman English text presents the basics of good, clear writing. Essays by diverse authors demonstrate the elements of good composition, and help students form ideas for their own writing. Extensively researched and class-tested, the authors use graphics, cartoons and photos at the beginning of each chapter to excite and hold student interest. Revised edition has seven new essays on such stimulating topics as: cloning, men's liberation, and U.F.O.'s. Retains the emphasis on key skills in basic rhetoric and grammar.
1979 432 pp. (est.) Paper $7.95

STAIRCASE TO WRITING AND READING: A Rhetoric and Anthology, 3rd Edition
Alan Casty—Santa Monica College; Donald J. Tighe—Valencia Community College
Basic survey of writing technique uses essays written by contemporary authors to illustrate the elements of good writing and introduce students to many different styles and topics. The beginning writer is walked through the preliminary writing process, to the basics of sentence structure, to paragraph structure and to the organization of the complete essay. Two-part book contains an explanatory section and an essay section that relate back and forth to each other. Updated edition retains the essays that class-tested favorably and has added new essays.
1979 480 pp. (est.) Paper $8.50

EXPLORING, VISUALIZING, COMMUNICATING: A Composition Text
William W. West—University of South Florida; Stephen H. Stremmel
Complete overview of beginning or intermediate college level writing with emphasis on giving students an understanding of how to generate ideas for writing, how to develop and organize them, and how to express them in appropriate form for various purposes to reach different audiences. Enables students to face both assigned and self-initiated writing tasks by following productive procedures. Includes detailed explanations and examples of all concepts, and pays attention to sentence style, mechanics, and conventions.
1979 240 pp. (est.) Paper $5.95

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition is published by Collins+World Publishing Co., Inc., and is distributed to colleges and universities by Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Prices subject to change without notice.

St. Martin's Press

Subject and Strategy

A Rhetoric Reader

Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa, University of Vermont, editors

From the comments we've received on Eschholz and Rosa's Subject and Strategy, it is apparent that many of you share our conviction that it is the most teachable rhetoric reader available for freshman composition. Here is what some of your colleagues have said about the book—

"Excellent! This book presents a good selection of readings which offer the student a logical view of the relationship between writing and reasoning."

W. C. Doss, University of South Carolina

"I am quite impressed by its format, the clear introductions to each mode of discourse, its reading selections, and most important, its exercises and writing suggestions."

Walter Sherwood, Sacramento City College

"The essays clearly illustrate the seven different types of composition which the student most frequently attempts to master. The emphasis on diction and vocabulary is praiseworthy. The suggestions for writing are imaginative and clearly derived from the reading selections. For any rhetoric based course in composition Subject and Strategy would be an excellent choice."

George Osmin, Western Michigan University

1978 410 pages, paper $6.95 Instructor's manual available

Some of the many colleges that have adopted Eschholz and Rosa's Subject and Strategy—

Adelphi University
Adrian College
Anchorage Senior College, U. of Alaska
Angelo State University
Arizona Western College
University of Central Arkansas
Auburn University
Bateson College
Biola College
Bloomington State College
Boise State University
Browynwiche College
Brooks Community College
Cabrillo College
California State College—Bakersfield
California State University—Chico
California State University—Fresno
California State University—Long Beach
California State Polytechnic Univ.—Pomona
University of California—Santa Barbara
Calvin College
Catholic University of America
Central Connecticut State College
Chaffey College
University of Cincinnati
City College—CUNY
Cleveland State University
University of Colorado
Concordia College— Moorhead
University of Connecticut
Contra Costa College
C W Post Center—Long Island University
Cypress College
Davidson College
DePaul University
University of Detroit
Duke University
College of Dupage
Elizabeth Seton College
Essex Community College
University District Columbia—Mt. Vernon
University of Florida
Fordham University
Fresno City College
Fullerton College
Fulton Montgomery Community College
Furman University
Charles Stuart Pratt Community College
George Mason University
Glassboro State College
Glendale Community College
Grand Rapids Jr. College
Grand Valley State College
University of Hartford
Henry Ford Community College
Holy Cross Junior College
Holyoke Community College
Illinois State University
Indiana University—Purdue University
Indiana University—South Bend
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana University Southeast
Jamison College
Jefferson Community College
John's Hopkins University
Kingsborough Community College
Knoxville College
Lafayette College
Lakehead Community College
Lane Community College
Lock Haven State College
Los Angeles Baptist College
University of Lowell—North Campus
Loyola University
Macomb County Community College
Macomb County Community College
University of Maryland—College Park
Mansfield University
Marquette University
Miami-Dade Community College—New World Center
University of Michigan—Ann Arbor
Middlesex County College
University of Minnesota
College of Missouris State University
University of Missouri—Kansas City
University of Missouri—St. Louis
Morris College
Montgomery County Community College
Moorhead State University
Moraine Valley Community College
Morgan State University
University of Nebraska—Lincoln
New Mexico Highlands University
Muskegon Community College
North Carolina Community College
University of North Carolina
North Carolina State University—Raleigh
North Dakota State University
Northern Illinois University
University of Northern Colorado
University of Northern Iowa
Northwestern University
University of Notre Dame
Oakland Community College
Ohio State University
Ohio Wesleyan University
Oklahoma State University
Our Lady of Holy Cross College—LA
Pace University
Community College of Philadelphia
Portland Community College
Portland State University
Queens College CUNY
Rhode Island Junior College
Rio Hondo College
Rivier State College
Rockhurst Institute of Technology
Roosevelt University
Russell Sage Jr. College—Albany
Sacramento City College
Saint Mary of the Woods College
Sales State College
University of San Francisco
Selon Hall University
Scripps College
University of Southern California
University of South Dakota
Southeastern Louisiana University
Southeastern Massachusetts University
Southern Collevage
University of South Carolina
Southern Connecticut State College
Southwestern College
SUNY College—Brockport
SUNY College—Buffalo
SUNY College—Oswego
SUNY College—Potsdam
Tennessee State University
Tennessee Tech University
Tennessee State University
Tennessee State University
Tennessee State University
Union University
United States Naval Academy
University of Vermont
Virginia Commonwealth University
Vanderbilt University
University of Washington
Washington State University
Western New Mexico University
West Chester State College
West Virginia University
Westside Community College
Wheaton College
Wichita State University
William Rainey Harper College
Winona State University
Winston State College
Winston-Salem State College
University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire
University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point
University of Wyoming

If you don't already have a copy of Subject and Strategy and would like to receive one for consideration, please write (specifying course, enrollment, and present text) to:

St. Martin's Press • P.O. Box 5352 • New York, NY 10017
Finally—a clear, step by step guide to rewriting

REVISING PROSE

Richard A. Lanham, University of California, Los Angeles

The more student papers I read, the more I think that America's current epidemic verbal inaptitude comes on two levels, rudimentary and stylistic. The rudimentary level is caused by a failure to teach simple functional literacy. Students on this level make mistakes from ignorance. They don't know the rules. On the stylistic level, though, something different happens. You are not so much making "writing errors" as trying, usually with indifferent success, to imitate a predominant style, one you see all around you. This style, which let's call "The Official Style," you'll find, too, in your textbooks and in the academic bureaucracy's official pronouncements. Naturally enough, you come to think that's what is expected of you and try to imitate it.

Revising Prose addresses this second, stylistic level of the verbal epidemic. It is concerned not with inspiration or argumentation but with stylistic revision. Maybe translation would be a better word— translating The Official Style into plain English. Revising Prose tries to make you self-conscious about what The Official Style is, what it means to write it, and how it can—and usually should—be translated into plain English.

From the Preface
1979  126 pages  $2.95 paper

Scribners
College
Department

For further information write to:
College Department
Charles Scribner's Sons
597 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
The best news yet!
Outstanding new titles and new editions for 1979

MODERN RHETORIC
Fourth Edition
ROBERT PENN WARREN
and CLEANTH BROOKS
Publication: January 1979
Paperbound: 416 pages
Instructor's Manual

ASPECTS OF COMPOSITION
Second Edition
BILLIE ANDREW INMAN and
RUTH GARDNER, University of Arizona
Publication: January 1979
Paperbound: 492 pages
Instructor's Manual

WORDS IN ACTION
MARTIN STEINMANN, JR.,
University of Minnesota
Publication: January 1979
Paperbound: 446 pages
Instructor's Manual

FORMS OF THE ESSAY
The American Experience
DEANNE MILAN and NAOMI RATTNER,
City College of San Francisco
Publication: March 1979
Paperbound: 384 pages
Instructor's Manual

HERE AND NOW III
FRED MORGAN
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 256 pages

USING ENGLISH
Grammar and Writing Skills
ADRIAN B. SANFORD
Publication: March 1979
Paperbound: 456 pages

COMBINING SENTENCES
MICHELLE RIPPOH,
WALTER E. MEYERS,
North Carolina State University, Raleigh
Publication: January 1979
Paperbound: 200 pages
Instructor's Manual

WORKBOOK OF BASIC WRITING SKILLS
CORAL L. ROBEY, ALICE M. HEDRICK,
ETHELYN H. MORGAN, HELEN MARLOWE,
and SARAH E. KREPS, of Tide Water
Community College, Frederick Campus
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 312 pages
Answer Key

HARBRACE COLLEGE WORKBOOK
Form 8C
SHEILA Y. GRAHAM,
University of North Carolina
Publication: Spring 1979
Paperbound: 394 pages
Instructor's Key, Diagnostic Tests,
Achievement Tests

WRITING TO THE POINT
Six Basic Steps
Second Edition
WILLIAM J. KERRIGAN, Fullerton College
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 244 pages

SHAPING COLLEGE WRITING
Paragraph and Essay
Third Edition
JOSEPH O. GALLO and HENRY W. RINK,
Foothill College
Publication: January 1979
Paperbound: 165 pages
Answer Key

DEVELOPING COLLEGE READING
Second Edition
LEE JACOBUS, University of Connecticut
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 352 pages
Answer Key

READING FOR THE POINT
WILLIAM J. KERRIGAN, Fullerton College
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 192 pages

LITERATURE AS EXPERIENCE
An Anthology
IRVING HOWE, The City University of New York
JOHN HOLLANDER, Yale University
DAVID BROMWICH, Princeton University
Publication: Spring 1979
Paperbound: 1088 pages
Instructor's Manual

WRITING THE RESEARCH PAPER
A Handbook
ANTHONY C. WINKLER
JO HAY McCUE, Glendale College
Publication: February 1979
Paperbound: 288 pages

HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, INC.
New York • San Diego • Chicago • San Francisco • Atlanta
DONALD A. DAIKER, ANDREW KEREK, & MAX MORENBERG

☑ THE WRITER'S OPTIONS
College Sentence Combining

LOUISE E. RORABACHER & GEORGIA DUNBAR

☑ ASSIGNMENTS IN EXPOSITION
Sixth Edition

HARRY SHAW

☑ A COMPLETE COURSE IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH
Eighth Edition

KEN M. SYMES

☑ COMPOSING THE ESSAY
Prewriting, Shaping, and Revising

SHERIDAN BAKER

☑ ON THE SENTENCE

BONNIEJEAN CHRISTENSEN

☑ THE CHRISTENSEN METHOD
Text and Workbook

Prices subject to change without notice. Prices quoted by Harper & Row are suggested list prices only and in no way reflect the prices at which books may be sold by suppliers other than Harper & Row.

Harper & Row
10 East 53d St., New York, N.Y. 10022
To request examination copies, write to Suite 5D (673).
Please include course title, enrollment, and present text.
We’re really excited about our new rhetoric/handbook…

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR WRITERS

DIANA HACKER
BETTY RENSHAW

Both at Prince George’s Community College

We think you will be, too. Here’s why: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR WRITERS—
- Fits the needs of the wide range of students who enroll in college composition courses.
- Takes students through the writing process step by step.
- Uses student papers-in-progress to illustrate the writing process, from prewriting to rewriting.
- Offers a non-threatening approach to problems of mechanics and usage.
- Includes over 250 suggested topics that encourage students to write about what they know.

A quick outline:

THE RHETORIC SECTION
The Writing Process
Writing with a Voice
Writing to Support a Point
Describing, Narrating, and Informing
Research Writing

THE HANDBOOK SECTION
Some Conventions of English
1. Punctuation
2. Capitalization
3. Spelling
Revising Problem Sentences
Dialect Interference

Appendix A: A list of Writing Topics
Appendix B: A Collection of Student Papers
Appendix C: Some exercise Answers

Paper approx. 352 pages December 1978
An Instructor’s Manual available

For further information, or to order examination copies please write to Sara Black, Dept. 2479

WINTHROP PUBLISHERS, INC.
17 Dunster St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138
HELP YOURSELF: 

A Guide to WRITING AND REWRITING

2ND EDITION
By Mattson, Leshing, and Levi

The key to a student's grammar improvement

"The text is well organized and offers much help to students on an individual basis. The material related to mechanics, grammar, and general organization is excellent, functional, and well worth using..."
— Martha A. Hart, Maricopa Technical College.

A flexible work-text, designed for students with grammar problems.

- An extensive diagnostic pretest is used to help identify the student's needs.
- Considers the 17 most common errors in mechanics, grammar, sentence structure, & organization.
- All aspects of the sentence are thoroughly covered and students are introduced to writing paragraphs and papers.
- Numerous examples & exercises provide reinforcement to develop self-confidence in students, along with the ability to complete their work.

Write: Gil Imholz, Editor, for examination copy.

CHARLES E. MERRILL PUBLISHING COMPANY
A BELL & HOWELL COMPANY
1300 Alum Creek Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43216
the world.” (p. 25) One’s own image of the world we may define as those elements of the student’s experience with which he has more than passing interest or concern. What’s worth communicating, then, is that material that the student wants to communicate; it is that material that reveals his own image or view of the world he confronts. “Confronts” affords another stumbling block. Since most of the student’s day-to-day experiences aren’t likely to reach out, take him by the collar, and shake him into realizing that they are A-number-one-noteworthy experiences, the student may not think he confronts much of anything. So he needs to become aware both of what may be interesting to him and of what may be perplexing or challenging (in the spirit of confrontation) to him. Thus, the need for some means of making known or revealing to the student material in his experience that is suitable for development into essays arises.

One means that has been used with some success is the journal. Rohman and Wlecke, for example, based a full third of their important study of prewriting on journal keeping. The students in this study kept journals of their responses to daily experiences and to questions Rohman and Wlecke posed from time to time. Each journal became not a diary but a depository of ideas, of student responses that could be used as a basis for writing. And the journal has made its way into current freshman composition texts as a means of invention — Winterowd’s The Contemporary Writer is one; Gorrell and Lafrd’s Modern English Handbook (6th ed.) is another.

A second means is the interest inventory, a device designed to cause the student to focus his attention on particular subjects. This inventory generally takes either of two forms. The first, and by far the more prevalent, is a catalog of general topics to which the student may resort if all else fails. These topics are broad; such listings as “athletics,” “television,” “pollution,” and “politics” appear often. And these catalogs are useful, serving to focus the student’s attention on subjects he may explore until he finds something in one area he thinks important enough to write about. More formalized than the first, the second type consists of more specific topics the student may examine as he searches for a subject. Louise A. Rorabacher, in A Concise Guide to Composition (3rd ed.), presents an inventory of this type, and I focus on it because it is the most comprehensive of those I’ve seen in freshman composition texts.

Rorabacher’s inventory is the culmination of her discussion of the uniqueness of each student, a discussion she hopes will cause students to realize they do have rich enough backgrounds to furnish them with subject matter for essays. Her directions for using the inventory: “Let your thoughts run slowly over the areas listed below, and others they suggest, to see what a wealth of material emerges.” (p. 2) The areas she lists cover a wide range of possible student interests — school, family, friends, attitudes; surely the student should find something here to write about. But Rorabacher’s instructions are inadequate. My students, I suspect, would give the list a cursory glance, think about the remainder of the reading assignment, and leave this inventory behind. And, more than likely, they wouldn’t return to it, not because it isn’t potentially valuable — it is — but because it wouldn’t stand out in their minds as an obvious aid in selecting a topic.

A far more valuable inventory would be one that calls for the student to respond in writing to a range of topics. Such an inventory would not only need to list areas of possible interest but also pose questions designed to elicit a response of some substance from the student. After foying with the idea of such an inventory for a year or so, I devised a simple one that I’ve had some success with. It consists of only a few questions or directions that focus the student’s attention on current interests:

1. In the last year, what five events or things that you observed or participated in interested you most?
2. In the last year, what five events or things that you observed or participated in disturbed you most?
3. What hobbies do you have?
4. What extracurricular activities do you engage in?
5. List the following:
   a. The last three or so movies you’ve seen.
   b. The last three or so books you’ve read for pleasure.
   c. Three or so of your favorite records, albums, or recording groups or stars.

Also included was such information as the student’s name, home town and its size, major, age, and college class. The general procedure for student use of this inventory was this: Having two weeks to complete it, students made two copies of the inventory, one for them to use and one for me to keep on file. Each student and I discussed the inventory in a private conference as soon as it was handed in; in these conferences, we discussed potential paper topics. And each student was assured that the inventory’s contents were privileged. Finally, students were asked to bring their inventories to all conferences and to classes prior to writing assignments, if they were having trouble choosing a topic, so that we’d have some background for discussing possible subjects.

While the procedure for use will stand, the inventory itself needs revision, primarily because the old inventory simply ignored the student’s background, focusing instead on current interests. Thus, this new inventory:

Answer the questions in five of the six areas below as fully as you can. Remember that this is designed to help you in selecting topics for essays — there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers to these questions will be held in confidence.

1. COMMUNITY
   a. Where do you live?
   b. What type of community is your home town or neighborhood?
   c. What especially interests or disturbs you about your community? Why?
   d. What particular places or events in your community do you enjoy? Why?
   e. What things about your community would you like to see changed? Why?

2. FAMILY/FRIENDS/ACQUAINTANCES
   a. What about your family is unique?
   b. Which of your relatives are especially interesting to you? Why?
   c. What special customs does your family have? (E.g., is there anything special about the way in which your family celebrates such events as birthdays, Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving?)
   d. What type(s) of pet(s) do you have? Have you had? Would you like to have? Why?
3. EDUCATION
a. What type of educational background do you have? (Consider kindergarten, elementary school, etc. — size, what you learned, teachers who impressed you.)
b. What types of courses have you taken? Are you taking? Which are your favorites? Which do you dislike? Why?
c. If you could change anything about any of the schools you’ve attended, what would you change? Why?
d. What informal (not strictly related to school) educational experiences have you had? How were they educational?

4. JOBS
a. What type(s) of job(s) have you had? What aspects of them interested you? Disturbed you? Why?
b. What career do you hope to have? Why have you chosen this particular field?

5. LEISURE ACTIVITIES
a. What hobbies do you enjoy? What makes each enjoyable?
b. What kinds of movies, music, and reading material do you like? Why?
c. What types of vacations or travel do you enjoy? If you could travel anywhere you’d like, where would you go? Why?
d. What types of extracurricular activities do you engage in? Why?

6. ATTITUDES AND ISSUES
a. Have you experienced a change in your attitude toward such things as politics, religion, school, family, or friends? If so, what was that change, and what caused it?
b. What event(s) in the past year or so has interested you most? Disturbed you most? Why?
c. What types of issues (e.g., political, ecological) interest you? Why?
d. Have the technological advances or changes you’ve seen been for the best? Why or why not? What technological developments would you like to see take place? Why?
e. Have the societal changes or advances you’ve seen been for the best? Why or why not? What changes in society would you like to see take place? Why?
f. What particular social customs interest or disturb you? Why?

Completing this inventory is quite a bit to ask of a student. For one thing, the inventory is lengthy. But if it is to be comprehensive, length is necessary, and since all questions may not necessarily apply to all students, potential responses may not be as long as the inventory might otherwise suggest. A more serious drawback is that many of the questions touch on potentially sensitive topics and call for extremely personal answers. But those students who feel they cannot answer questions in a particular area may avoid that area, as each student decides which of the six sections to exclude. Or the instructions could be reworded to allow the student to respond to only those questions about which he feels comfortable. This would allow, for example, a student to skip the questions about family but to answer those about friends and acquaintances, all of which are listed in the second group of questions.

But there’s a more important consideration than convenience in asking students to complete the inventory. Much of current theory about writing deals with writing as a means of discovery, with every writing assignment helping the student to learn more about himself, to learn about his attitudes, his interests, his judgments. Obviously, the inventory inventory focuses on these concerns, and from this focus may come the intense involvement with a topic that characterizes the best writing. Thus the inventory’s potential is great: it may reveal to the student his interests and then, in the student’s exploration of those interests, help kindle the spark, the urge to say something to somebody, that marks the beginning of an effective piece of communication.

Peer Tutoring and the Problem of Rhetorical Superiority

Andrew F. Macdonald
Pan American University

The "Report on Teaching: 2" edition of Change magazine (Number 6, Volume 8; July, 1976) includes, according to the blurb on the cover, "analyses of some of the most notable improvements in American Undergraduate Teaching." This is a large claim indeed, one bound to leave "its trail of the disaffected," as editor George W. Bonham says in the introductory editorial. One hesitates to label one's self as "disaffected" by arguing with a notable improvement, but large claims invite criticism, particularly when they fail to make clear the theoretical and practical limitations of the programs they promote. The instance in question is an article by Ronnie Dugger, "Cooperative Learning in a Writing Community," a report on "peer tutoring" in composition, that is, the system in which more advanced students tutor less advanced ones who have writing problems. Like many teachers, I have tried this system on an informal basis in my classes, and generally have been pleased with the results, as were my students, but I still feel that the article fails to make clear some of the limitations inherent in the system, a system which may be something less than "one of the most notable improvements in American undergraduate teaching." I was also bothered by some of the entries in the "log" kept by the tutors, which Dugger reproduces in part:

Please note the following comments made by the instructor [on a paper]: "If I was in English, I’d quit!" and "Your writing is atrocious, too damn wordy, and the essay doesn’t make sense" (p. 31).

Dugger does not comment about this note or its inclusion in the log, but a paragraph in the article perhaps makes clear why it is important:

Peer tutoring is the name of the program, and collaborative learning is the theory behind it. A premise of the program is that students have trouble writing because "they’re writing in a situation in which they’re always subordinate to the teacher — they’re always writing up." . . . Collaborative learning seeks to replace "top
down" education by changing (what its adherents see as) its power relationships (p. 30).

The teacher's comments are obviously "written down" to the student, and there is a clear implication in the "please note" that this is not the way it should be. Harsh criticism, it is implied, is destructive of a student's ability to write, or perhaps of his motivation, and should be discouraged.

On the surface, there is little to argue with here; as the most infrequent after-dinner speaker realizes, fear of being judged and found wanting constricts the mind (metaphorically) and even the throat (literally). Foreign language skills provide the most telling example: a persistent cop in a foreign country can reduce our laboriously acquired and proudly exhibited vocabulary to the four-year-old level if we enter into the colloquy insecure and guilty. Perhaps our most common experience with the shrinking of verbal skills is when a frightening event shatters our linguistic tranquility and we find ourselves babbling the most simplistic patterns, often aware of their inadequacy, but unable to call to mind what would be readily available in a calmer state.

Fear is the enemy of language, certainly; and who cannot find sympathy for the freshman or sophomore entering his teacher's office, often to confront a person of another sex, race, or culture with which he has had little experience, a person he has seen only two or three times a week at a distance of at least six, and more likely twenty, feet. The teacher, experienced at this physical and psychic distance, has been performing a highly stylized and often unintelligible ritual, one which, the student has been told, will better him in certain unspecified ways while assuring his future marketability. Now he is to meet the great man or woman behind the scenes, in the dressing room, so to speak, to learn of his own inadequacies person to person. Is it any wonder that palms holding F papers sweat, stomachs churn, and normally flexible minds freeze? Is it any wonder that even friendly and relaxed teachers come to dread these initial encounters which must be patiently transformed into a normal social situation before a student and teacher can get down to business? The trapped rat response is among the most difficult for a writing teacher to deal with, for human experience teaches us to tread warily and make no sudden moves when threatened; never volunteer, as they say in the Army, and let your opponent make all the moves. Such a response, while realistic in threatening situations, is not conducive to free discussion, and peer tutoring is a happy alternative, as teachers who try it even on an informal basis soon discover. The problem with peer tutoring, however, is its inherent limitation, for it simply duplicates one part of the process of writing in "real" (i.e., non-academic) life while failing to supply some of the advantages of the admittedly contrived situation of a writing class.

Everyone who writes frequently, whether as a professional writer or as a decidedly amateur letter-to-the-editor addict, is likely to use peer tutoring. That is, we typically search out a non-threatening reader before we bare our verbal souls to the world; such a reader is a "peer" in the sense that he is somebody we trust not to judge us too painfully, whether he be a spouse, a colleague, or a friend. Formal peer tutoring programs may be most valuable in pointing out the utter good sense of testing our thoughts among friends before releasing them for the enemy to shoot at; such programs may also supply the student with a suitable peer unavailable elsewhere, and certify the legitimacy of asking for such a reading. For, sad to say, teachers sometimes discourage, however ineffectively, their students from reading each other's papers before they are turned in; if plagiarism is unlikely, this represents a faint ringo of hypocrisy on the part of academics who may have had multiple readers of theses, dissertations, and articles before such works saw the light of committees and editors. But peer tutoring is probably limited to this rather humble function in the process of writing, that of a friendly reading, for such tutoring supplies little of the expert "feedback," as we say in these days of software and interfaces, from the superior to whom we typically write.

Virtually all of our significant writing is done for superiors. By "superior" I don't necessarily mean "more elevated" in the social or organizational sense, but rather people from whom we want something, whether it be a job or financial reward, praise, political agreement, admiration, cooperation, or whatever. Our "superiors" may actually be our social inferiors, as when we address the great unwashed and uninformed through an incisive letter to the editor, but our rhetorical position, whatever our tone, is that of inferior to superior, of supplicant for the time and attention of the reader. We may, on occasion, write to our rhetorical inferiors, as when we order employees (or students) to do something, but even here the superior position can lead to embarrassment, as writers of ill-phrased memos may discover. The rhetorical superior always has the ultimate weapon available: he can simply stop reading. Peers, of course, are by definition our rhetorical equals; and although they have been chosen because they are our equals, or because we perceive them to be, they can be most useful to us by taking the role of the rhetorical superior, and letting us know how such a reader will react to what we say. Such a role is by nature difficult for the rhetorical peer, particularly an inexperienced one; after all, such a reader has been chosen as likely not to wound us, because they love us, or because they can't do much better, or at least because they will be reluctant to inform us of the fact that they could.

The readers who count, then, are our rhetorical superiors, people whose attention or approval we desire and whose favorable emotions toward us, if any, will be overruled by the role they play as teacher, boss, potential boss, or "general reader." It is in this situation that our relationship to our reader is different in a college writing class than in the "real" world. We can demand "feedback" from a writing teacher, feedback unconfused by the content that complicates a teacher's comments on a history essay, or the personal relationship that adulterates a boss's criticisms of a report. Feedback, after all, is what a writing course should be all about. In such a class we should receive numerous chances to make mistakes so a superior can react to them and tell us what to do about them. A writing class should be like a laboratory experiment in which all the variables but one, our writing skill, are held constant. Writing in real life, of course, offers no such guaranteed detailing of our failures; responses may range from ominous silence to violent disagreement, but we may never learn of our mechanical and rhetorical deficiencies apart from the subject we are writing about. Cynics may point out that this happens in writing classes too, but this should be blamed on bad teaching, not on the structure of the relationship between student and teacher.

It is at this point that I must disagree with the attitudes expressed at the beginning of this discussion. If our important writing is almost always done to our rhetorical superiors, how can we possibly avoid "writing up"? How can we possibly change the "power relationships," whatever these
may be, and eliminate the "subordinate" position of students when in fact all students will be subordinate as long as teachers give grades, and when all of our important writing will be done with the writer as a subordinate? Of course students have trouble writing in such a situation; that is why writing is difficult, because we are demanding the attention and time of a reader who may not feel disposed to grant it to us. Dugger himself, a professional journalist, is a subordinate when he submits an article for publication, as is any writer not assured of automatic acceptance.

Here too I must disagree with the attitude implied by the inclusion of the remarks made by teachers on students' papers: "If I was in English, I'd quit!" and "Your writing is atrocious, too damn wordy, and the essay doesn't make sense." How are we to react to this? Is this evidence of teachers' arrogance, intolerance, and cruelty? We are told in another entry from the log that a "professor" had "yelled at" the student author of a "very well-written, well-researched paper" which needed "rearranging" and "clarification" (what kind of teachers does this school have, anyway?). The remarks are certainly rude, even blunt, but what we need to know is left unexplained: Should this person in English quit? Is the writing atrocious, too damn wordy, and does the essay make no sense? If the answers are in the affirmative, then the teachers are doing what they are paid to do, not politely, certainly, but with a remarkable and memorable intensity; is it not flattering to have someone react so strongly to what we write? Better abuse than a hollow "well done."

It may seem trivial to argue at length with an article so generally inoffensive, but important theoretical implications are involved. Rhetoricians since the time of Plato have been accused of cynicism, amorality, and the acceptance of things as they are. Such accusations no doubt will be leveled against the argument that we do most of our significant writing to rhetorical suppes and that writing courses should recognize that fact. Curiously, though, the ancient rhetorical emphasis on practical methods and disinterested analysis accords nicely with the recent emphasis on relevance in college courses. "Relevance," of course, was the movement begun in the late sixties that related the concerns of the academy and those of the outside world. If we accept this idea, we must agree that writing courses, in order to prepare us for "real" writing, should mimic the relationships of the outside world; in other words, there should be relevance of structure as well as of content. While we should set up relationships more humane and forgiving than those in government or business (we shouldn't "fire" a student for a single failure, for instance), we must not create a hothouse atmosphere in which delicate plants thrive briefly only to shrivel before the first blast of cold (or perhaps hot) air. Fear of failure is what we must learn to deal with, and a writing class should teach students how by permitting frequent, but not terminal, failure.

Peer tutoring, rather than being one of "the most notable improvements in American Undergraduate Teaching," as Change would have it, is a technique of undeniable but limited usefulness. To claim more for it is either to deny our experience with writing in the outside world, or to assert that training in college should bear no resemblance to the conditions experienced after graduation. Peer tutoring, in fact, seems to be yet another attempt to solve human problems with techniques, a response dear to the hearts of technologically directed Americans, but one which denies the ancient and proven formula of a competent teacher involved with motivated students under conditions which foster learning. If bad teaching is the problem, then get better teachers, but don't deny the right of teachers to yell at students when they think the students deserve it, for such a response is simply a sign of human involvement, and is not the exclusive privilege of band directors, football and drama coaches, and ballet masters. There is a whiff of hypocrisy in Dugger's article, and the treacly smell of the academy insulating itself from the outside world.

**What Literature Teachers Know About Teaching Composition That They Don't Know They Know**

Louise W. Phelps
Case Western Reserve University

Until recently, very few members of English departments would have challenged the prevailing conventional wisdom that the typical English teacher's literary background is adequate preparation for teaching composition. It has been widely held that to teach students to write plain, clear, everyday prose one needs mainly to write decently oneself, an "elementary" skill required of anyone with a degree in "English" (read "literature"). Given that qualification, the right temperament (compassionate, patient), and a few years' seasoning in the trenches, so the argument runs, the English professor is as well-equipped as anyone could be for the job of teaching writing.

In the last few years, however, the once scattered voices protesting these easy assumptions have been gathering strength. The heresy that composition teachers (like literature teachers) can and should be scholars of their own subject is spreading, especially among graduate students who are not yet fully indoctrinated in the traditional views of composition and are alert to implications of the shrinking market for those with literary degrees. I count myself one of these. I turned away from pursuing a doctorate in literary criticism to study the basic language disciplines, in order to understand as much as possible about the cognitive processes underlying writing and reading. By this choice I affirmed my belief that to teach composition properly one must be a specialist in discursive language and the processes of producing and comprehending it, just as literature teachers must be specialists in literary scholarship and criticism. Writing is "elementary," yes, but not in the sense that it is simple to do, to understand profoundly, or to teach. It is indeed a basic skill, basic to human cognition and social action, and thus by definition the greatest possible challenge to pedagogy.

With this bias, it may seem odd that I've chosen to write here about what literature teachers know, instead of what they don't know about teaching composition. The reason is an irony of my experience in the past two years of studying disciplines like linguistics, stylistics, and psycholinguistics. After all, I am myself the product of a traditional literary education (through the M.A.), which continues to influence me even as I turn to less subjective, more systematic and "scientific" points of view toward language. I have found myself testing the theories these disciplines offer against my own intuitions and experience, and discovering in the process how seriously I had undervalued my earlier literary training as a source of insight into language performance. In fact, the experience of literary readers like myself in using language and analyzing how it works gives us unique qualifications for
judging theories of language performance in terms of their ability to account for our trained observations. It turns out that language theory cannot yet begin to match our educated intuitions and practical knowledge.

At the same time, I have begun to realize how often and how deeply, in my own teaching practice, I draw upon the knowledge and skills acquired in a basically literary education. Reflecting on these facts has led me to the questions I'd like to try to answer in this essay: what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience acquired in a literary education have relevance to teaching composition? Exactly how are they relevant? And how can we adapt them to the task of teaching writing? The answers I'll sketch out are presented here in necessarily general terms, but they have had specific practical impact on my teaching techniques and classroom approaches.

In debating the relationship between literature and composition, our profession has always focused on content — literature as art, or ideas, or morality — rather than method. Every field of human learning selects an aspect of reality about which knowledge is desired, and practices a characteristic intellectual method for acquiring that knowledge. Such a method constitutes a paradigm for discovery which defines acceptable ways to collect data, make inferences, hypothesize, theorize, evaluate, and judge. It generally expresses itself in a characteristic activity — in the case of science, for example, experimentation. In literary studies that activity is the close reading of texts, which embodies the theoretical assumption, the values, the concepts and techniques common to the discipline.

By analyzing literary method as expressed in the close reading of belletristic texts, I hope to show that it is exactly appropriate and applicable to the critical task of reading student texts (specifically, student drafts), even though the purposes differ. In the case of literature, we are reading first to explicate and interpret; second to explain, compare, and judge in personal, social, and literary contexts. In the case of student drafts, our purposes are threefold: to interpret, to diagnose, and to teach. Or more precisely, to interpret a text which is by definition neither self-coherent nor fully expressive; to diagnose problems in the discourse as a thought structure and a communication; and to teach the writer ways to complete his composing process successfully by rethinking and revision. There is considerable overlap in the function of reading in these two situations, each of which has interpretive, responsive and judgmental components. But the difference in purposes does require that we adapt the techniques of reading literary texts to the task of reading student drafts, and I will return to the question of how we may do that after analyzing the literary method itself.

The modern analytical approach to literature offers us two interdependent tools for dealing with texts. The first is the ability to observe in fine detail the features of written language and to be responsive to its effects. The second is a set of concepts with which to organize our observations and make inferences about meaning. In the skill of observation I would include these component abilities: to notice features of discourse; to recognize significance in features; to recognize relations among features and patterning in general; and to describe objectively and accurately what is observed, with reference to textual evidence. The ability to recognize significance in relation to some criterion is particularly important, because it gives us a principle of selection in our analysis.

The ability to observe depends ultimately, however, on possessing concepts with which to organize our perceptions. The spectrum of concepts available in literary criticism is very broad and differentiated to a high degree of delicacy. While the range and depth of such theoretical concepts can and should be extended by the study of linguistics, stylistics, and other such disciplines, even an undergraduate already has access to an extensive and subtle critical vocabulary for describing both linguistic features of a text and reader responses to it.

Let me begin with grammatical concepts, to illustrate not only their essential commonality among literary readers but also their applicability to student writing. In literary tradition grammatical concepts are not used to construct grammars but to construe texts. It does not really matter whether they are traditional, structural, transformational, tagmemic, or some exotic blend; their function is always the same: to organize information about textual features at the level of sound, word, and sentence. These textual features are understood to create meanings both propositionally, through syntax, and stylistically, through the symbolism of form. Grammatical concepts are used partly to examine the immediate impact and meaning of language, and partly to serve as clues to larger structures and global qualities such as tone or ethos. I myself have used grammatical concepts for these purposes in analyzing student texts, as opposed to using them to locate and stigmatize error. For example, one approach I've used is to isolate from the text words of a certain part of speech and consider them as a group. We can learn something from the student's characteristic preference for certain parts of speech; from the typical semantic and formal qualities of a particular part of speech in a text — for example, the abstractness of nouns; or from contrasts, like active versus passive verbs. We can look at the interactions of chains or clusters of words in the text, or their function in larger syntactic and rhetorical units. Consider pronouns, for example. The personal pronouns, especially choices and alternations among "I," "you," "we," "one," and impersonal nouns, can reveal problems or maturing abilities in decentering and in the relation of writer to audience. Another grammatical concept, tense, can be used to discover how much a writer has freed himself from the chronology of his perceptual experience of events, including intellectual events, which psycholinguists call "episodic memory." If the writer has not been able to create a conceptual structure to organize that experience other than perceptually, the result in terms of discourse organization is a narrative rather than an expository structure. Past tense reveals a narrative conception of experience, sometimes appropriate but often indicating a problem in abstracting from episodic memories of thought experiences, like following the plot of a novel or the stanzas of a poem from beginning to end, or learning a sequence of historical events.

In addition to grammatical concepts we can draw on a stock of logical, stylistic, rhetorical, and generic concepts, among others, to organize our perceptions of a text. Some of these have long been applied to composition teaching, although more for prescription than analysis: for example, comparison and contrast or cause-effect relations are logical principles transformed into formal principles of expository discourse. Our textbooks rely heavily on concepts of argument, such as thesis or claim, premise, conclusion, induction, and deduction. Similarly, certain concepts deriving from classical rhetoric have traditionally been used in teaching composition — for instance, the notions of
persuasion and audience. But the full range of concepts which we employ habitually in literary analysis for discussing meaning, structure, language, and the reading experience has never been exploited in composition teaching. In fact, our traditional concepts in composition not only are pitifully limited and quite inadequate for understanding the complexities of texts, they actually inhibit good reading. Those in most common use, like thesis, thesis statement, topic sentence, and the labels for methods of paragraph development, have become clichés which close off thought and lead us to deliver prepackaged judgments or prescriptive lectures instead of responding with sensitivity to a text. Although the conceptual categories available in literary criticism have not often been applied even to literary non-fiction, much less to student writing, I find that they illuminate student drafts in unexpected ways. For example, the concept of dramatic situation, along with persons, dramatic action, and other related terms, suggests to me the possibility of analyzing the student's text as a series of dramatic actions or speech acts. An interesting set of verbs comes to mind for naming the intellectual and rhetorical actions of discourse, some emphasizing the relation of writer and world, others the relation of writer and audience, most of them both. Here are some of them: define, explore, consider, contrast, show, illustrate, prove, examine, point out, begin with, conclude. In sophisticated writing the writer uses these verbs metalinguistically, or perhaps I should say metadiscursively, to refer to his performance, telling the reader what he has done, is doing, and will do. This suggests that we ask students to try building a plan of discourse around such verbs, instead of the traditional outline. One merit of such a discourse plan is that it names very specifically what the writer is going to do, but not necessarily the results of his act, which he may not know when he begins composing.

In a general sense what many literary concepts have to do with is the identification of significant patternings in language, seen as significant because of their relationship to meaning patterns. In the case of literary texts one looks for controlled and completed patterns which cohere and make possible overall interpretation of the meaning of the text. But patterns of both thought and discourse are recognizable to expert readers even when incomplete, half-conscious, and uncontrolled; and thus in student writing, patterns of thought which have not fully become patterns of discourse can be observed, just as we can see these emerging in early drafts of a literary text. The difference is that the student may not know how to go on from the draft.

A particular virtue of literary concepts is that they are intended to account for multiple meanings. No good reader ever presumes that a text, or any sentence in it, creates a single, unambiguous meaning. The reader treats the text as producing a sequence of meaning experiences or "dramatic meaning," from which he reconstructs, retrospectively and through rereading and analysis, a structure of meanings "intended" by the writer. To read and to interpret, that is, to construe a "structural meaning" for the text as a whole, requires an amazing number of complex cognitive actions by the reader. The process draws on the reader's memory, his knowledge of language, his knowledge of the world; his capacity to predict and anticipate; his abilities to recognize assumptions, to see implications, to correlate and reconcile meanings, and finally to integrate into a whole. Throughout, the interpretive act is directed and constrained by language, which sets outer bounds for possible meanings; but it is not determined by language because the reader's contribution is in calculable.

Expert literary readers conceive of a text as creating multiple meanings in still another sense, by cueing meanings at many different levels, drawing on all the sub-systems of language — lexical, phonological, syntactic deep and surface structures, and so on — as well as on the reader's knowledge of the world. The literary reader is particularly alert to the difference between declared or inferred meaning — that is, propositional meaning — and formal meaning, which is created by style. Because he recognizes all these sources of meaning, the literary reader is prepared for the possibilities of ambiguity and conflict among meanings, a fact which gives him a great practical advantage in reading, understanding, and recognizing problems in student drafts, where ambiguities and conflicts often cannot be resolved by a criterion of internal consistency.

In speaking of dramatic meaning earlier, I suggested an aspect of textual interpretation which turns away from the text and looks with the same clear eye at the reading act itself. This approach is being emphasized in current subjective criticism, but it has always been a part of literary interpretation. It details the reader's temporal act of comprehending and responding to the text, considers how the act is accomplished, and, particularly, analyzes how the text instructs him to perform that act. We have a large vocabulary of terms about our reading act and responses — expectations, reversal, surprise, emphasis, and anticipation, for example, and we are taught how to trace these effects to the language of the text. The fact that our powers of observation can be turned on the reading act itself is invaluable in reading student drafts for purposes of diagnosis, because we can specify what goes wrong in terms of reactions like confusion, boredom, or rejection, and link these to the language of the text.

The knowledge about language and meaning accumulated in a long tradition of close reading of texts constitutes a theory of language, whether we realize it or not. We, unlike many linguists, conceive meaning as an experience in the mind rather than something inherent in language. We treat meaning as underdetermined by language, requiring an act of imagination and reason to reconstruct it from the text. But even more important than knowledge, or a theory of meaning, I think, are the values implicit in the literary method. Like the scientist, we value objectivity and insist that claims be supported by evidence. But unlike the scientist, we also value principled subjectivity. What makes that subjectivity principled is that we share concepts to describe and organize our subjective insights, and that we relate our responses to objective information about language. It is this principled subjectivity that makes literary judgments rational and public rather than arbitrarily personal. Taken further, I want to suggest, it can justify the imaginative leaps beyond the first level of interpretation that we must make in order to offer constructive editorial help to the writer.

One value I am afraid we do not consistently transfer to student drafts is our scrupulous respect for the literary text and the author's purpose. In reading literary texts, we are humble and hard-working readers who treat problems in interpretation as our own failures of attention and insight, at least until proved otherwise. We attribute to the writer's rationality, purpose, even a kind of esthetic morality or good will. In reading student texts, we should offer the same
begins as soon as we interpret it, because we cannot do so without making the imaginative leaps I have described. But in its active phase intervention involves providing information, advice, or direction which will change the student's composing behavior. At this point we confront a moral problem, because there is no question but that we are meddling in the student's thinking processes. (English teachers feel uniquely guilty about this, as if they were the only teachers that try to change the way students think.) The question is not whether we are going to intervene, because we can't avoid it; the question is whether or not we are going to base our intervention on moral principles. What I have tried to suggest here is that the literary method allows us to perform the act of intervention ethically, by making it possible to base it on considerable data, justified inference from the data, and respect for the implied intentions and directions of the student's cognitive processes.

Although there are other sources of data on what's going on in the student's mind, the draft is by far the most productive. I would summarize our responsibilities as teachers reading drafts this way: first, to give the student the fullest possible information about what he is doing and how his actions are affecting us as readers so that he can consciously control them; and second, to extend his options by supplying or directing him to knowledge he lacks. This might be knowledge of the world — facts; knowledge of genre and language conventions; knowledge of language structure; or concepts and labels that will help him or organize what he knows.

It is mainly our first responsibility which the literary method empowers us to fulfill, although we will surely draw on a literary education for the second as well. I do not think this application of the literary method in class or conference or writing lab is any more impractical than analyzing literary texts in those situations. And I believe that turning the whole battery of these critical resources on student papers will not only be fruitful, but also bring to those texts a dignity that composition teachers have too often denied them.

Another Look at Sentences

Lester Faigley
University of North Dakota

While I was in graduate school, paying my dues as a graduate teaching assistant, a professor in another department once told me that my job as a teacher of writing was to teach freshmen how to spell and where to put their commas. I didn't have a ready answer for him then, but I did know that most of the student papers I received would still have been mediocre even with flawless spelling and uniform punctuation. Lately I've been hearing similar comments along with everyone else who admits to teaching college writing courses, which have no doubt been inspired by the plethora of articles in newspapers and popular magazines on the decline of verbal skills at all levels of education.

Despite public opinion I think most composition teachers agree that our job only begins with attention to gross errors in spelling, punctuation, and usage, the Opens quoted in Newsweek and other periodicals to show how poorly the students really do write these days. Anyone who has taught a freshman English class likely recognizes certain qualities
Christensen has been criticized for drawing his examples from works of fiction, with some critics doubting if syntactic structures typical of narrative and descriptive writing carry over to expository and persuasive writing.\textsuperscript{6} For the Hall-Emblen writers, at least, the expository and argumentative essays differ little from the narrative and descriptive essays in this respect.

On the other hand, the mean percentage of total words in free modifiers for the student essays is 16.1, almost half that of the Hall-Emblen essays.

<p>| PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL WORDS IN FREE MODIFIERS AND THEIR PLACEMENT: COLLEGE FRESHMEN AND HALL-EMBLEN WRITERS |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean % of Total Words</th>
<th>% in Modifiers</th>
<th>% in Initial</th>
<th>% in Medial</th>
<th>% in Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Freshmen</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall-Emblen Writers</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all the difference in T-unit length between the anthologized writers and the student writers are a result of an increase in the number of words in free modifiers. Excluding free modifiers, the mean of the essays in the Hall-Emblen anthology is 12.4 words per T-unit, just above the student mean excluding free modifiers of 12.2 words. Besides using fewer free modifiers, the students display an overwhelming tendency to put them before the main clause — almost seventy-five per cent of the words in free modifiers appear initially.

Percentages in individual essays illustrate this tendency even more emphatically. Only three of the twenty-seven essays measured in the Hall-Emblen anthology have more words in initial free modifiers than in final, but twenty-seven of the thirty-two student essays have more words in initial position than in final. Ten students place free modifiers only in initial position, another ten have more than sixty per cent of the words in free modifiers before the main clause. Just thirteen students included any medial modifiers. In contrast, every essay measured in the Hall-Emblen anthology has free modifiers in medial and final positions; only one essay places the majority of words in free modifiers before the main clause.

Of course, not all sentences in the Hall-Emblen anthology contain free modifiers — half the sentences have no free modifiers and only one sentence in four is a cumulative sentence — nor is it necessarily true that a certain percentage of words in free modifiers determines a mature style. Three essays in the anthology have fewer words in free modifiers than the student mean. Nevertheless, the comparison between the freshman essays and those in the Hall-Emblen anthology does tend to support Christensen’s conclusion that skillful writers use a larger percentage of words in free modifiers than do student writers, especially in final position.\textsuperscript{7}

Examples of dangling and misplaced modifiers in student papers indicate a compulsion to put these elements before the main clause. One such instance reads: “Dan had the look of a lumberjack. With a red plaid shirt, broad shoulders, and a bushy moustache, you could tell he had been around.” Clearly, “with a red plaid shirt, broad shoulders, and a bushy moustache” belongs at the end of the first sentence and not at the beginning of the second. The student may have mispunctuated the two sentences, but the evidence points to a strong preference in student writing for placing free modifiers initially. The reason why students do this is not clear to me. Fifteen years ago Christensen cited the misguided advice of teachers as a major reason for this practice in student writing.\textsuperscript{8}

One would think that Christensen’s essays, widely reprinted, along with those of Hunt, Loban, and others would have changed the mistaken notion that skilled writers use numerous introductory subordinate clauses to add variety to their sentences. Yet at a recent national conference of English teachers, an audience was told that a prose style which “begins each sentence with an emphasized idea [creates] a voice pattern which suggests the heavy, monotonous beat of a drum with no accompanying melody. To achieve a pleasing harmony of varied voice patterns, the writer must use a variety of sentence patterns with frequent introductory subordinate ideas.”\textsuperscript{9} Apparently the Hall-Emblen writers enjoy drum solos since four of every five of their sentences begin with the subject noun phrase while fewer than one in twenty begin with a subordinate clause.

The variety in the sentences of skilled writers comes in large part from the ability to manipulate constructions, such as absolutes, rarely used in speech. We can assume that most professional writers have learned these skills through reading and through practice, but in the limited time of a college writing course, we can hardly trust simple exposure to good prose to produce a significant improvement in our students. Two-thirds of the students whose essays I analyzed cannot approximate the prose of skilled writers no matter how well the students spell and punctuate because their syntactic repertoire is limited to a handful of options. For me this is more than sufficient justification to begin a college writing course with emphasis on the development of syntactic skills.

NOTES

\textsuperscript{1}Thomas Clemens assisted me in compiling the statistics reported below.

\textsuperscript{2}Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1965); Syntactic Maturity in Schoolchildren and Adults (Chicago: Society for Research in Child Development, 1970).

\textsuperscript{3}Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1973), pp. 46-49. The students selected for this study were judged typical of the student body according to their performance on the ACT English examination.


\textsuperscript{5}Christensen found thirty-two per cent of total words in free modifiers in six essays published in Harper’s: “The
Epileptic and Englishpapere:  
A New View of an Old Style  

Kenneth I. Dowst, Jr.  
University of Iowa  

Sir John Harrington’s maxim, though susceptible of appropriation by superpatriots, still has relevance to the teaching of composition:  
Treasure doth never prosper: what’s the reason? For if it prosper, none dare call it treasure.  

As with treasure, so with Englishpapere, as the following excerpts from two essays in that style will attest:  

There is one country that speaks of peace, liberty, and equality for all — America is its name. It tries to be fair and helpful to all, giving aid wherever it is sought. Most other countries look up to us as a powerful friend who is just, but benevolent . . . There is one problem, though, which could be the cause of our country’s demise. I’m speaking of the hash feeling certain groups of Americans have toward others. Too much bitterness arises from misunderstanding and lack of cooperation . . . We could defeat ourselves by the dissention cultivated within our own ranks. If it is a case of the whole nation fighting and suffering together, that ought to suit us, because we are the most united of all the nations, because we entered the war upon the national will and with our eyes open. . . . No one flinched or wavered. . . . Death and ruin have become small things compared with the shame of defeat or failure in duty. . . . [T]he gratitude of every home throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are changing the tide of world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.  

It may seem almost sacrilegious to lump together Churchill and a patriotic freshman — yet could you say with any certainty where the over-simple, clichéd-ridden freshman essay ends and Churchill’s famous address begins? We cannot escape noticing that the two passages are remarkably similar in style and in content — yet none dare call the latter “Englishpapere.” Churchill’s essay I found in a collection of Great Addresses. The freshman’s prospered less: it was given to me by a colleague who considered it to represent the nadir of undergraduate prose.  

We face a dilemma so long as we consider only the style and content of these essays, for we can comfortably neither praise the freshman’s essay nor dismiss Churchill’s verbal achievement. The existence of this dilemma suggests that we cannot adequately come to terms with what is wrong with English-papere-in-general by considering, as most textbooks do, only style and content. We can resolve our dilemma by introducing a consideration of “situation,” which we can say comprises setting, purpose, and audience. By considering “situation” we would be examining discourse not as literary critics but as rhetoricians. I think that the field of rhetoric offers both a new way of looking at English-papere and a new name for it.  

An old name, rather. As good rhetoricians, we would first turn to Aristotle, and here we would find something surprising: Aristotle describes Englishpapere almost perfectly. More precisely: today’s undergraduates (and Churchill too) seem to be producing in very pure form discourse in one of the Aristotelian modes, the “epileptic.”  

In his Rhetoric, Aristotle distinguished three modes of discourse. “Deliberative” discourse was appropriate to the legislature; its subject was expedient future action, and its characteristic device was the example. “Forensic” discourse was appropriate to the law-courts; its subjects were past fact and justice and injustice, and its characteristic device was the enthymeme (a syllogism based on probability). “Epileptic” discourse was appropriate to speeches to the general public; its subject was the praiseworthy or the blameworthy, and its characteristic device was magnifying or minifying.  

The passages I quoted from Churchill’s speech are obviously epileptic. The freshman’s, surprisingly (and, it would seem, less appropriately), conform to Aristotle’s account of epileptic equally well. Both essays are in effect speeches directed to the populace. Churchill’s is addressed to the House of Commons and to the British people; the freshman’s seems to be addressed not so much to a Professor of English as to the crowd at an Independence Day rally. “There is one country that speaks of peace, liberty, and equality for all — America is its name.” Both pieces concern primarily the praiseworthy and the blameworthy, the characteristic subjects of epileptic discourse. Churchill praises the British people for their steadfast resolve and then praises the pilots of the Royal Air Force. The freshman praises the home of the free and the brave and then blames “certain groups” — I suppose he means white people and black people — for their “misunderstanding and lack of cooperation.” And we can see that the device of “magnifying,” also characteristic of the epileptic, is overwhelmingly present in both compositions.  

Magnifying, for Aristotle, consists in exaggerating the virtues of one’s subject by describing it in the most flattering terms possible — always defining “virtue” strictly in accordance with the popular conception thereof. So America “tries to be fair and helpful to all, giving aid wherever it is sought.” Churchill’s “magnifying” is equally extreme: “We are the most united of all the nations . . . we entered the war upon the national will . . . No one flinched or wavered.”  

Furthermore, the freshman and Churchill are following Aristotle’s advice to the epileptic orator on whom and how to praise: “it is not difficult to praise the Athenians to an audience of them. And whatever the quality an audience esteems, the speaker must attribute that quality to the object.
of his praise. 3 To Englishmen at war, praise the unflinching
determination, devotion to duty, dauntless courage, and
prowess of the English people; to Americans in peacetime,
praise the peacefulness, liberty, equality, helpfulness, and
cooperation of the American people. The style of both essays,
at least, is more impressive than the content — a characteris-
tic of epideictic on which Aristotle’s successors expounded at
some length. In fact the paucity of content in epideictic
discourse led quickly to the decline of its academic respecta-
bility. Quintilian noted that Roman teachers of rhetoric had
rejected the mode, leaving the teaching of it to the mere
grammarians. 6

I think that the essay on America is, if a little extreme,
typical of much of undergraduate writing. No matter what
their subject, essays by students, even good students — espe-
cially good students — tend to bear these same characteris-
tics of epideictic: an emphasis on praise or blame — especially
praise of institutions or virtues beloved by the public at large —
a reliance on the device of “magnifying,” content much
less sophisticated than style, and diction suggesting a public
address. Many passages of “English” cited in Ken Macrorie’s
Telling Writing fit this description just as well as the essay on
America. One of these begins, “The automobile is a mech-
anism fascinating to everyone, in all its diverse manifestations.”
So does a gem of “Themewriting” quoted by William E.
Coles, Jr., which begins, “I believe that the past is tremen-
dously important to the success or failure of everyone later on
in life. My past has taught me many valuable lessons that I
will not easily forget.” So does a student’s essay reprinted in
Donald Hall’s Writing Well: “Education is of paramount
importance to today’s youth. No one can underestimate the
importance of a good education,” and so on. (Talk about
praising the Athenians!) Mina Shaughnessy’s Basic Writing
students have produced less sophisticated versions of the
same. 7

But why give this type of writing another name? Why not
retain the expressive and witty names already common:
“English,” “Themewriting,” “Englishpaperese,” and “Black
Rot”? Or, given the similarities between this style and Chur-
chillian oratory, why not simply call it “acute Churchill-
ness”? What exactly is to be gained by dragging in Aristotle
and terrysyllabic Greek nomenclature? I can think of three
advantages.

First, seeing Englishpaperese as a species of epideictic may
provide some reassurance to a teacher, even hope, by placing
today’s literacy problems and Edwin Newman’s jeremiads in
a historical perspective. It may be of some comfort to realize
that the humanities have managed to survive for a number of
years since Socrates found himself amazed at Lysias’ prepos-
terous panegyrics and Aristotle decided that perhaps a new
handbook was in order. 8

More importantly, Aristotelian terminology gives us a
tenable way of talking about what exactly is wrong with such
writing. Terms such as “English” and “Black Rot” make too
broad a condemnation: fishy, rotten Englishpaperese, they
indicate, is appropriate nowhere, to nobody, under no cir-
cumstances. But students know that a few clichés in praise of
the established values can often yield real rewards. I myself
once gained a bronze-plated trophy and some local fame in
return for an essay on the topic, “Optimism: Youth’s Most
Valuable Asset.” Students who have seen similar prizewin-
ning essays, who occasionally read newspaper editorials or
letters to the editor, or who have ever heard a speech by a
politician know that the stuff sells. Students who contem-
plate a career in what they call “the real world” cannot take
seriously an unqualified dismissal of a form of discourse that
sells so well. And we, who have read Churchill, should real-
ize that at its best it can do more than merely sell a product.
Most textbooks fail to recognize the utility that English-
paperese (and other humble forms of epideictic) do possess;
to make matters worse, the books argue that the style is bad
only in terms of literary standards — standards to which few
non-English-majors have made any commitment. 9 Aris-
totle’s thoughts on Englishpaperese are much more useful in
describing what is wrong with the stuff — wrong as a re-
response to the situation of a college student.

The epideictic mode, according to Aristotle, does not lead
the writer or the reader to new insights about what has hap-
pened in the past or about what is just: these are the ends
of forensic discourse. Nor does it lead to new insights about
how one should act: this is the end of deliberative discourse.
Thus epideictic does not help a writer or a reader deal with
most of the important problems confronting any thinking
person, particularly a young college student. If the writer of
epideictic is at least dealing with the question of values, he is
hardly doing so in the most helpful manner. Insofar as he is
writing epideictic, he is not supporting his generalizations
by reasoning carefully from facts, as is the writer of forensic
discourse, or by carefully choosing and explaining examples,
as is the writer of deliberative discourse; rather, he is making
his points by oversimplifying complex issues, exaggerating
virtues and defects, and pandering to the conceit of the audi-
ence. Such behavior might often be expedient for politicians,
but it is hardly compatible with the search for knowledge and
truth that a college student is undertaking. Even some of
those students who reject “searching in college for knowledge
and truth” as old-fashioned, elitist, reactionary, or irrelevant
to “the real world” may with the aid of Aristotle be per-
suaded that the writing of epideictic Englishpaperese is itself
old-fashioned, elitist, reactionary; for in following the Aris-
totelian injunction to “magnify” or “minify,” the writer of
epideictic creates a persona that is more dogmatic, less judi-
cious than the writer himself, a persona that invites readers to
become less than they are. In adhering strictly to the most
conventional conceptions of virtue and vice and in magnify-
ing the rewards of acting accordingly, the writer of epideictic
actively discourages questioning of the status quo and argues
to himself and others that “Whatever IS, IS RIGHT.”

Perhaps the best reason for seeing Englishpaperese as a
species of epideictic is that doing so enables us to make use of
the insights of modern rhetoricians who have studied the
epideictic mode. By elaborating on the inherent conservatism
of epideictic discourse, the rhetoricians enable us better to
understand the peculiar appeal of the mode to today’s under-
graduates.

Like English teachers, rhetoricians have noticed that laud-
ing popular virtues and “magnifying” inevitably lead the
writer of epideictic to elevate cultural commonplace — even
commonplaces that the writer knows to be at best half-true —
to the status of eternal verities. 10 Most other countries look
up to us as a powerful friend who is just, but benevolent.”
Period. Jacques Ellul notes that commonplaces are a cata-
logue of collective illusions, distortions, and self-glori-
fications, largely produced by a ruling class and disseminated
by it. Its “commonplaces express the values indispensable for
the proper functioning of the society” — as currently orga-
nized — “and at the same time reveal the justifications,
perhaps illusory, that the group chooses to make its actions
acceptable.” America “tries to be fair and helpful to all, giving aid wherever it is sought”: we heard this quite a bit during the Vietnam War.

Chaim Perelman sees the value of epideictic discourse as its ability to increase the intensity of popular adherence to certain values held in common by the audience and the speaker, thus strengthening people’s disposition towards action. This may be expedient when the established order is threatened from without and conflicting values impede action. (So epideictic discourse would be more appropriate to Churchill’s England of 1940 than to our English classes today.) Like Ellul, Perelman stresses the conservative nature of epideictic: it “is less directed toward changing beliefs than to strengthening the adherence to what is already accepted.” The writer or speaker achieves this by inspiring a sense of “communion” among the audience and himself centered on those values.

“We are the most united of all the nations... we entered the war upon the national will... No one flinched or wavered.” The freshman sees the established order as threatened by racism, but this malady, he implies, infects neither him nor any of his readers but only “certain groups of Americans” — reminiscent of the “small but vocal minority” that Spiro Agnew invited us to join him in opposing.

But why would a college student want to write epideictic orations? Discourse in this mode may be relatively easy to write — yet after all not that easy, for however simpleminded the content, the style is typically more complex. The first sentence written by our patriotic freshman, for example; has a consistent grandeur of tone and a syntax marked by both balance and climax: “There is one country that speaks of peace, liberty, and equality for all — America is its name.” This is not a sentence dashed off without care. Another cause of undergraduates’ selecting the epideictic mode might be a principle of conservation of energy developed in previous composition courses. If earlier teachers had emphasized grammar, mechanics, and style much more than content, student-writers, in favoring the epideictic mode, could apply almost all of their intellectual energy where it “counted.” Another cause may be the non-threatening nature of epideictic. Uncommitted to inexcusable logic or critical questioning, committed only to praising popular Athenian virtues to an Athenian audience, the writer runs no risk of upsetting any of his cherished preconceptions, prejudices, and hopes. Perelman speaks of the “optimistic, lenient tendency” of epideictic, noting that the mode “is more reminiscent of a procession than of a struggle.” It is understandable that a young college student, suddenly confronted with a new environment, new challenges to his views, and a host of new problems, would want to grab as much psychic comfort as he can lay his hands on. This would help to account for students’ continuing to compose themes in Englishpaperese, even when their teachers plead for something more “deliberative.”

As would a fourth explanation, which synthesizes the rhetorical theories of Ellul, Perelman, and Kenneth Burke and which, like the previous explanations, sees discourse as a response to an entire “situation.” A typical college student today — to assemble some truisms — is a biological adult for whom the adult world has little place. Having completed almost a third of his life, he is still denied by our society its credentials of adulthood: a profession, property, credit, full legal status, spouse, a regular income, freedom of action, and acceptance into adult society. To use a term of Kenneth Burke’s, he and the adult world are not “consubstantial.” The dismal job-market prevents a student from anticipating achieving full adult status even upon graduation. His situation is, in short, frustrating and not a little degrading. One tool at his command is style. “In its simplest manifestation,” says Burke, “style is gratification. It is the attempt to gain favor by the hypnotic or suggestive process of ‘saying the right thing.’” Burke’s important contribution is his realization that establishing a sense of communion (establishing “consubstantiality,” “ingratiation,” “identification”) is often the very end sought by a speaker or writer. Epideictic is obviously the mode of discourse best suited to this end.

Thus while epideictic discourse is not necessarily banal, the “rhetorical situation” in which an undergraduate composes almost guarantees the banality of his epideictic essays. But the student who writes Englishpaperese for English class misappraises part of his “situation,” especially his “audience.” Composition teachers do not find banality, conventionality, and intellectual docility “ingratiating” to the extent that the student assumes all adults do. The student thus commits not just a stylistic blunder but a rhetorical blunder.

These arguments suggest that, regardless of the approach of most textbooks, this type of writing cannot be abolished by invoking only standards of literary style. By examining the entire discourse situation, we can see that very strong extraliterary motives may underlie the composing of epideictic Englishpaperese, motives growing out of the very structure of present society. But perhaps by dealing with such writing in its situation we can at least reduce its incidence, for I think we can help a student to see that epideictic is inappropriate to what a writer in a college could be doing for himself as a person — liberating his mind and undertaking a search for truth — and inappropriate to the audience to whom discourse in a college is addressed. We can increase the creditability of our critique by admitting that the epideictic mode does have value and by admitting that writing Englishpaperese may well bring real rewards in certain situations outside of college. But barring a grave political crisis demanding maximum social cohesion, perhaps epideictic could be left as much as possible to politicians, while we teachers and students concentrate on the “deliberative” activity more immediately relevant to higher education.

NOTES

1 I am using the term “style” fairly broadly, to include tone, attitude, choice of subject, and method of development, in addition to diction and syntax.
2 British Orations from Elzevirs to Churchill, Everyman ed., revised (London: Dent, 1960), pp. 366-68. (Churchill’s words begin, “If it is a case of the whole nation.”)
4 Rhetoric, I, 9 (pp. 50-51).
5 Ibid., p. 51.
6Instituto Oratoria, II, i, 1, 2, 8, 9.
7 Ken Macorje, Telling Writing (New York: Hayden, 1970), p. 6; William E. Coles, Jr., Teaching Composing

8The first reference is to Plato's *Phaedrus*.

9Coles's text, *Composing*, is an exception.


11Ellul, pp. 13-14; the sentence quoted is from p. 14.

12Perelman, pp. 50-54; the sentence quoted is from p. 54.


15Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 9 (p. 46); Perelman, p. 51 (the words quoted are Perelman's).


---

**Freshman English News**

TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

FORT WORTH, TEXAS 76129

---

**THIRD CLASS**