NEW GRADUATE COURSES IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION: A NATIONAL SURVEY

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During the past two decades the field of rhetoric and composition has seen the advancement of several new and significant ideas which, taken together, have created a genuine revival of interest in the subject. The readers of *FEN* are well aware of the many outstanding recent publications of the work of Christensen, Corbett, Hunt, Kinney, D'Angelo, Emig, Shaughnessy, and many others — and our purpose here is not to review these substantial contributions. What we do hope to show is the extent to which the ideas of these scholars have taken root and now manifest themselves in graduate level courses in departments of English. Specifically, we are reporting on the number and kinds of new graduate courses in rhetoric and composition which departments of English have introduced within the past four years.

To identify the colleges and universities which offer graduate work in English, we turned to *Peterson's Annual Guides to Graduate Study* (1978 edition). Then in order to construct a random sample of the 450 schools listed in the Guide, we drew a total of 164 usable three-digit numbers from a table of random numbers. (Any number which was drawn twice or which fell above 450 was discarded.) The schools which corresponded to the randomly drawn numbers were then chosen for the survey. Of the 164 survey forms distributed, a total of 89 (or 54.3%) were returned. Based on these returns, the following table indicates the number of institutions which have introduced new graduate courses in rhetoric and composition during the past four years.

THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN AND CANADIAN DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH OFFERING NEW GRADUATE COURSES IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION, 1974-1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No new courses</th>
<th>Experiences other than courses; non-credit courses</th>
<th>One new course</th>
<th>Two new courses</th>
<th>Three or more new courses</th>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4 (4.5%)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9 (10%)</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
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<td>(27%)</td>
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From a national perspective the distribution offers several interesting insights about the state of the discipline. First of all, it shows that about one department in four has made no commitment in terms of formal graduate course offerings. On the brighter side, though, approximately half the departments (or perhaps a bit more than half, if non-course experiences are included) have offered at least one new graduate course in the field. Approximately fifteen to twenty percent of the departments have offered two or more such courses. Overall the distribution indicates that, in a period of general retrenchment, rhetoric and composition has been a growing and healthy endeavor. In view of the traditionally conservative nature of departments of English, it is especially encouraging to note that three out of four departments nationwide have recently inaugurated at least one new graduate course in rhetoric and composition.

Although the random sample is an appropriate technique for determining the number and distinction of new courses, it is not satisfactory for identifying the kinds of courses offered. Consequently to make certain that we were asking the "right people" we added to the random sample those schools which to the best of our knowledge were offering graduate level work in rhetoric and composition. Specifically, we added 31 of the 43 schools listed in Gregory Cowan's "1978 National Directory of Graduate Programs For Junior/Community College English Teachers" (*Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 4, 1978). The other 12 schools from Cowan's Directory had been previously chosen in the random sample. The total sample, then, includes 195 schools, of which 164 were randomly selected and 31 selected on the basis of their likelihood of offering such courses.

Our discussion of the kinds of courses is based on 104 responses from the 195 institutions surveyed, which represents a 53.3% return. The questionnaire asked the respondents to give the title and a brief description of "any graduate course(s) in rhetoric and composition which your department has proposed or introduced within the past four years (1974-1978)." We then classified the many diverse responses into six broad categories: (1) The Teaching of Rhetoric and Composition, (2) Theory of Rhetoric and Composition, (3) Advanced Writing, (4) Basic Writing, (5) Research in Rhetoric and Composition, and (6) Stylistics.

I. The Teaching of Rhetoric and Composition

A large number of responding institutions (53) indicated the introduction of one or more new graduate courses in rhetoric and composition with a substantial pedagogical emphasis. In addition, many schools indicated that such graduate courses were not new in their curricula and therefore fell outside the scope of the present survey. In light of these facts, two initial generalizations seem warranted: first, a substantial majority of American and Canadian colleges and universities presently have active graduate courses in the teaching of composition; and second, the years 1974-1978 were a period of rapid expansion in the offering of such courses. To facilitate description, the courses introduced from 1974-1978 are divided below into five categories: (i) teaching college composition; (ii) teaching composition in grades 7-14; (iii) teaching composition at any level; (iv) workshops; and (v) teaching technical writing.

(i) As might be anticipated, the restricted focus of graduate courses in the teaching of college composition encourages direct practical application of composition theory to the college classroom situation. The best statistical indication of this is that twelve of the sixteen new courses which restrict themselves to the teaching of freshman composition are required for all graduate teaching assistants at those schools.

Because the organization of most of these courses was coordinated with the extant freshman program at each school, these courses as a group tended not to be innovative. As a respondent from California State University at Sacramento indicated, "Our course in 'Teaching Composition in College' is anything but new, and while it does review current research in an introductory
way, it does nothing itself that could be called innovative.” “College Teaching in Language and Literature” at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas is representative of courses tied very closely to the freshman sequence. The textbooks are those used in the freshman composition courses and the sessions “follow the same syllabus, keeping about a month ahead of the composition classroom assignments.” At Duke University the syllabus for “Seminar in the Teaching of Composition” is “closely harmonized with the English 1 syllabus” and enrollment in the “Internship in Teaching College English” at the Graduate School of the City University of New York requires concurrent teaching of a freshman course in one of the colleges of the University. Similarly, enrollment in “The Teaching of College Composition” at Loyola University (Chicago) is restricted to new teaching assistants.

The description of Loyola’s course seems representative of the dual allegiance that many schools feel to provide both a theoretical and a practical introduction to the teaching of college composition: “Models of composition courses; approaches to teaching composition through traditional rhetoric, tagmemics, self-discovery, generative-rhetoric, and behaviorism; most importantly, practical matters related to the teaching of composition at Loyola.” At West Virginia University the “Teaching Practicum” reflects this complement of application and theory in its organization. At first new graduate assistants “learn how to teach a structured writing course using the self-paced method and private tutorials. The GTA’s write all the assignments which their freshmen will be writing and thus acquire first-hand experience of the struggle their students are having. In the last seven weeks, we review the major theories of contemporary American rhetoricians and composition specialists.” “Teaching of College English” at Texas Tech University begins with an intensive (six to seven hours each day) six-day workshop for new assistants before the semester starts. For the first half of the semester the course meets twice a week for a total of three hours; thereafter, the professor meets with students in individual conferences. As is frequently the case at other schools, class visitation and review of graded papers are integrated into the course. However, complementing the practicum emphasis, “most readings, research, and discussion focuses on recent (post 1965) practices, developments, and objectives in the teaching of rhetoric and composition.” This tension of theory and practice appeared again and again in course descriptions: “Theories and techniques of teaching rhetoric and composition” (Southern Illinois University); the course “begins with practical training in discussion and lecture technique... concludes with discussion of contemporary literary theory and its applications to the freshman setting” (University of Nevada).

(ii) In graduate courses emphasizing the teaching of composition in grades 7-14, the same tension of theory and practice exists with, not surprisingly, an intensification of concern with actual classroom methodology. The rationale most frequently given for courses in this category is that most teachers “have heretofore been poorly informed about the teaching of composition and are unaware, for the most part, of recent developments in the field.” In line with this rationale, most new courses designed for grades 7-14 include surveys of traditional rhetorical theory, contemporary discourse theory, the psychology of the composing process, or any of a number of other topics with an eye toward classroom application. “The Teaching of Writing” at Trinity College (Hartford, Connecticut) is representative of the concern of such courses “to answer questions of practical concern about the teaching of composition.” “Teaching Writing (Grades 7-13)” at the University of Dayton is similarly designed to update teachers “on research in, and approaches to, teaching com-

position. The emphasis is pragmatic, and theory is introduced only as rationale.”

Only two of the twelve courses in this category are required for graduate assistants involved in the respective freshman composition programs. Responses indicate that the great majority of students in these courses are junior high and high school teachers, many of whom are currently teaching. To accommodate this clientele, several of the courses are offered either at night, off-campus, or only during the summer. Also, there is occasionally evidence of cooperation between Departments of English and teacher training programs. For example, at Trinity College “The Teaching of Writing” is given the dual designation “English/Education 565” and at Mankato State University the new graduate English course “Problems in Teaching Composition” is a revision of an earlier course in their undergraduate teacher preparation program. Similarly, a proposed revision (not tabulated in the present study) of “Composition for Teachers” into “Studies in Rhetoric and Composition” at the University of Kentucky is “an effort to give true graduate identity” to a former teacher training course.

(iii) Fifteen courses were not designed to emphasize composition instruction at any particular level, although even in this group two of the courses were required of new graduate teaching assistants. The description of “Writing and the Teaching of Writing” offered at Canisius College as a “skills course” which focuses “on the process of writing” is representative of the courses included in this section. Consideration of writing as process rather than product is a recurrent concern in course after course, frequently using as focus James Moffett’s Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Baton Rouge: Houghton Mifflin, 1968) or Janet Emig’s The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (Urbania, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971). Several discussions in “Teaching Composition and Reading” at the University of Louisville illustrate the pervasive process approach: “The Composing Process and the Organization of a Writing Course,” “Teaching Syntax from a Generative Perspective within the Composing Process,” “What Kind of Writing Should be Emphasized in a Process Oriented Writing Course?”

As the topics above suggest, courses within this group tend to examine rhetorical theories or models in order to understand their implications for teaching composition at every level. “Problems in Teaching Composition” at Eastern Illinois University, for example, is specifically designed “to introduce current theories of teaching composition and to explore their classroom application. Students are constantly being asked to compare the various theories for agreement and difference.” In contrast to the courses in sections i and ii, courses in this section are more likely to direct attention to theories of composition. Despite its title, for example, “Teaching Composition” at San Diego State University is described as the reading of the “philosophical bases” of composition.

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(iv) Despite the indication that many new courses in the teaching of rhetoric and composition are being offered in the summer so that employed teachers may take advantage of them, there seems to be little evidence as yet of a similar growth in graduate level summer composition workshops. Only two schools described such workshops, one of two weeks and the other of five weeks duration. Both workshops offered instruction beginning at a very basic level. One syllabus included a time for “Explanation of How to Record Ideas for Teaching Composition on 4 x 6 Cards.”

(v) Three institutions in our survey initiated graduate courses in the teaching of technical writing during the period 1974-1978. The rationale at Eastern Michigan University is representative: “Because technical writing fixes on practical and job-oriented writing tasks, it is in wide demand, but there are presently only a handful of teachers trained specifically to teach writing, and none to teach technical writing.” Given the demand for teachers of applied writing, the small number of schools adding graduate courses in this area seems surprising. It is possible that some schools did not identify such writing courses as falling within the survey request for information on “any graduate course(s) in rhetoric and/or composition which your department has proposed or introduced within the past four years (1974-1978).” Also, the three respondents who described their offerings made clear that there was some degree of what they characterized as “elitist” resistance to such courses. Thus, faculty suspicion regarding the legitimacy of such courses almost certainly inhibits the development of graduate courses in the teaching of technical writing.

Among the fifty-three colleges and universities which introduced courses with a substantial pedagogical emphasis there were interesting variations and resemblances not mentioned above. Some English departments have no graduate courses in composition and have no intention of initiating any. In contrast, several schools already have ambitious, integrated graduate programs in this area and seem committed to continued expansion. Where such courses exist there is a parallel contrast with regard to how graduate composition courses fit into the curriculum. At some schools credit in such courses, even when required of graduate teaching assistants, may not be used toward meeting degree requirements. Other schools make a graduate course in the teaching of composition a core requirement.

II. Theory of Rhetoric and Composition

Since several new courses effectively embody both practice and theory, it may seem arbitrary on our part to discuss these categories separately. There are, however, several reasons which justify the division. First of all, practice and theory are the two largest categories and therefore must reflect major concerns of the profession. The very size of the categories seems to require separate description. Too, though the profession has long been concerned with the problem of teaching composition, particularly at the freshman level, broad interest in underlying theory has only recently come back into vogue. Further, the results of the survey suggest that theory and practice may be engaged in a kind of mitotic process, i.e., that the value and worth of each may be perceived as justification for separate courses for each. (We emphasize the word “suggest,” realizing that surveys cannot describe process but only point directions.) The most compelling reason, though, is that new courses in theory alone do exist, and the apparent quality of such courses deserves the attention and recognition of the profession.

New courses in theory (exclusive of those discussed above which give attention to both theory and practice) fall generally into three groups: (i) courses which provide a comprehensive view of both traditional and current theory; (ii) those which treat theory chronologically, with emphasis on major historical figures; and (iii) courses which deal exclusively with modern rhetorical theory. In all, respondents reported a total of 43 new courses in this category, of which 12 could be classified as comprehensive, 8 as historical/chronological, and 23 as modern.

(i) Schools which have developed a course in general, comprehensive theory include College of William and Mary, Case Western Reserve, Tulane, Alabama, and Kentucky. Typically the pattern of textbook selection for this course involves one text outlining the classical tradition (such as E. P. J. Corbett’s excellent Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student) and one or more texts describing current theory. The course at College of William and Mary is representative. Offered for the first time in the spring of 1979, Eh 554, “Theories of Rhetoric and Composition,” was “designed to offer M.A. candidates an introduction to and overview of the subject matter of classical and contemporary rhetoric.” Along with Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric, the texts are Christensen and Christensen, The New Rhetoric; Tate, Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays; and Lanham, Style: An Anti-textbook. The course was “instituted in response to graduate student demand,” and the overall attitude of the faculty toward the course is described as “very favorable.”

(ii) Several of the institutions which offer a separate course in classical theory (e.g., Iowa, Indiana, Southern Cal, UNC-Greensboro, Louisville) also offer other courses in rhetorical theory. Apparently a number of schools with well established programs view the subject of rhetorical theory as important enough to justify two or more courses in it. The advantage of this arrangement seems obvious: it permits direct contact with specific works in translation. The course at Indiana University, for example, includes readings from Plato, “Phaedras” and “Gorgias”; Aristotle, Rhetoric; Cicero, De Oratore (Books I, II, and III); Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria; Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric; and George Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric.

Eh 672, “History of Rhetoric,” at the University of Louisville is described as a survey of “the rhetorical tradition (Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, seventeenth through the twentieth century).” Primary texts include Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bacon, Ramus, Whately, Bain, Richards, Burke, Booth, Blackmur, Weaver, and contemporary theorists.

Careful reading of classical texts such as those described above provides an historical perspective unavailable to the composition teacher of the past.

(iii) More interest and enthusiasm were generated around the topic of modern rhetorical theory than around any other aspect of the survey. Of the new courses in theory, the largest number (23) were concerned exclusively with modern theory. Patricia Bizzell wrote the following about the course she teaches at College of the Holy Cross:

What may distinguish this course from those given in other graduate programs is its emphasis on composition theory and pedagogy as a field worthy of scholarly inquiry. I aimed to convince both students and faculty that composition theory should be treated on equal footing with any literary specialty, with the important difference that anyone who intends to work as a college teacher ought to know something about this field, regardless of his or her literary specialty.

“Theory of Rhetoric and Composition,” which was originally taught at Rutgers in 1978, is described simply as a "survey of recent theoretical approaches to composition." The required
texts for the course define more precisely what is meant by "recent theoretical approaches": Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations; Young, Becker, and Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change; Tate, Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays; Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed; Elbow, Writing Without Teachers; Christensen, Notes Toward a New Rhetoric; and Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse. Student reaction to the course is described in very positive terms: "Graduate student demand was largely responsible for the institution of the course; those who took it were pleased, and others wanted to take it and insisted it be given again."

The course at Florida State, "Modern Rhetorical Theory," is taught by James McCrimmon. Texts in the course include: Burke, Language as Symbolic Action; Golden, Bergquist, and Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought; O'Hare, Sentence-Combining (NCTC); Christensen and others, The Sentence and the Paragraph (NCTC), plus supplemental readings. Reaction to the course is described as "generally positive." Interestingly, one student evaluation described the practical, utilitarian value of this course in theory:

For me the most valuable part of Dr. McCrimmon's course was the application of the rhetorical principles which he discussed. . . . Thus the experience of the class was extended from the mere application of principles to teaching of composition. It became, and is still becoming, the application of principles to life, to perceiving the mind of man.

The course at Iowa State illustrates a feature common to most new courses in contemporary theory, an emphasis on syntactic rhetoric, i.e., the work of Mellon, O'Hare, Christensen, Hunt, Becker, and others. Aply entitled "Syntactic and Rhetorical Analysis," the Iowa State course covers the following topics: (1) the definition and measurement of maturity in syntax, (2) use of sentence combining exercises to increase syntactic complexity, (3) use of Christensen rhetoric to teach syntactic versatility, (4) analysis of errors in syntax, and (5) an approach to the rhetoric of the paragraph and whole discourse.

A course following a somewhat different pattern is offered at the University of Pittsburgh. EH 238, "Contemporary Rhetoric," emphasizes meaning as the central concern of rhetoric. Again, the texts define the direction of the course: Johannesen, Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric; Richards, Philosophy of Rhetoric; Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives; Langer, Philosophy in a New Key; Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed; Young, Becker, and Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change; and Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction.

We estimate from the survey that roughly one graduate English Department in five has developed a new course in rhetorical theory within the past four years. There is no discernible geographic pattern in the distribution; the courses are apparently being developed in all regions of the country, in large schools as well as small. From the forms returned to us, we sense not just great enthusiasm about these courses but a willingness to stake a professional career on an emerging discipline. As Professor Bizzell wrote, Composition is indeed "a field worthy of scholarly inquiry," and course work in theory is at the heart of that field.

III. Advanced Writing

Eight schools surveyed have added one or more courses which provide writing instruction at the graduate level. Of the thirteen courses added, all but one carry credit toward an advanced degree. By far the most ambitious addition has been at the University of Iowa where there are now separate courses in "Writing for the Humanities," "Writing for the Sciences," "Writing for Business and Industry," "Writing for the Arts," and "Critical Writing." The University of Texas at El Paso has developed a program in Professional Writing and Rhetoric which includes "Applied Composition and Rhetoric" ("a writing course focusing upon logical argumentation, problem-solving, informal writing, and persuasion") and a "Writing Practicum" ("a supervised experience in addressing, responding to, and resolving an academic or commercial communication problem through the preparation and perfection of an appropriate document"). Several courses are conceived of solely as service courses to specific areas of the school, as with "Advanced Writing—Technical and Professional Writing" at New Mexico State University or "Advanced Writing and Research Reporting" at Virginia Commonwealth University, a course requested by departments in the pure and social sciences and directed to graduate students in fields "other than English." An almost equal number of new graduate writing courses are interdisciplinary. The "Advanced Writing Workshop" at Southeastern Louisiana University provides individualized instruction "adapted to the level of the student and based on the content of his major and/or minor." Three schools believe that their courses provide essential training for the writing teacher. Conceived as an exercise in "experiential learning" based on the Bay Area Writing Project, the "Seminar in Writing: Practice and Theory" at Lehman College of the City University of New York is "aimed at helping teachers from grade school up to and including college learn to teach writing by engaging in writing themselves."

IV. Basic Writing

New courses in basic writing are a testimony to the influence of one person and one book. The person is Mina Shaughnessy; the book Errors and Expectations. The survey revealed eight schools which have proposed or developed graduate courses in Basic Writing. These include schools as diverse as the Universities of Florida, Alabama, and New Mexico, Utah State, Montclair State College in New Jersey, VPI, the University of Hartford and Virginia Commonwealth University. The description of the course at Utah State is representative:

Rhetoric and Basic Writing, a three semester hour course, covers the history of college level remedial education in America. Included in the historical overview is an exploration of the major learning theories currently influencing the shape of more than 700 basic skills centers in two and four year American institutions. Complementing both the historical and theoretical approach to basic writing is the pragmatic aspect of the course: a brief internship in remedial teaching.

The University of New Mexico includes an innovative feature in its course. Participants are required to demonstrate their skill in teaching basic writers, and their performance is recorded on videotape for later review and analysis.

Though Errors and Expectations is the favorite text in these courses, several others were also mentioned. These included Patricia Cross, Beyond The Open Door and Accent on Learning; Robert Pooley, Teaching English Usage; J. H. Black, Mastery Learning; Peter Elbow, Writing Without Teachers; Stephen Sherman, Four Problems in Teaching English; and Roueche and Snow, Overcoming Learning Problems.

V. Research in Rhetoric and Composition

Four schools have developed or proposed courses with a particular emphasis on research — Ball State University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, University of Louisville, and State University of New York at Albany. A proposed course at the University of Louisville, "Research in the Writing Process," re-
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quires students to "review current, experimental research into the writing process in education and composition journals." In order to understand research techniques, participants are also required to gain some comprehension of "basic work in statistics and quantitative analysis." One interesting feature of the course is its use of the freshman English sequence as a laboratory for research. Required texts include several NCTE research reports—Loban, Hunt, Bateman and Zidonis, Mellon, and O'Hare.

At Ball State, Eh 595, "Seminar in Composition," emphasizes "special research problems in English composition, using recognized techniques of research, extensive readings in selected texts, group discussions, and conferences." The course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania surveys "current research in the composing process with a particular focus on the invention process." The texts used in the course reflect a remarkably good balance of the different aspects of research: Winterowd, Contemporary Rhetoric; Britton, et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18); Strong, Sentence Combining; Emig, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders; Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations; Mactoric, Telling Writing; and Cooper and Odell, Evaluating Writing and Research on Composing.

Though only a handful of schools reported new courses in research, the potential value of such courses is clear.

VI. Stylistics

Although some attention was given to style in virtually every course description we received, three schools introduced new graduate offerings with an almost exclusive focus on style. The intention of "Style and the Structure of Discourse" at the University of Chicago is "to integrate a theory of style that speaks to the needs of teachers (rather than linguists) with a theory of text structure" in order to provide "a framework for understanding how texts work and where they go wrong." "Stylistics" at York University involves a close study of selected texts, using techniques from modern developments in descriptive and historical linguistics. Interestingly, the texts analyzed are primarily from British literature of the period 1660-1789. As its title indicates, "Stylistics and the Teaching of English" at UCLA uses the study of style as an introduction to classroom technique.

In conclusion, we would like to mention one course which does not fall into any of our categories. A respondent from Eastern Washington State described a course entitled "The Composing Process" which is in the early planning stages. With the current professional interest in learning theory and cerebral functions, it is tempting to speculate on what might be included in a course which fully explores the psychophysiological bases of composing.

Our job here, though, is not to speculate but report on new courses. Knowing full well how difficult it is to convince fellow faculty members as well as budget-minded deans of the value of a new course, we recognize the work that has both gone before and gone into these courses. Too, we take this occasion to thank the many respondents who took the time to describe their work. If our survey has any value, credit should go to those of our colleagues who are not only making new trails but blazing them for the rest of us to follow.

A Dramatic Essay Not on the Teaching of Poesy

Jasper Neel
Francis Marion College

[The following events, though cast in fictional form, are too clear in my mind to be mere figments of the imagination.]

About two years ago, one of the private foundations on the upper floors of a lofty midtown Manhattan office building decided to turn its attention, and its funds, to the writing crisis. At the time, there were still frequent reports on the decline in literacy. Although this particular foundation is not large, its board had decided to spend as much as fifteen million dollars over a three-year period: peanuts compared with what NEH was giving away, but enough to attract the attention of those on the make for composition grants.

In the late 1950s, the foundation had made a name for itself as an educational innovator by funding experimental programs for teaching math. The programs proved successful, and mathematics education in America was changed significantly by a few million dollars well spent by a small, private foundation. A couple of years ago, the board and the staff decided to do for writing what they had done for math. After all, a national emergency seemed evident, and the foundation had been successful in responding to such emergencies in the past. The foundation knew that the government was spending untold sums — through OE, Right to Read, NEH, FIPSE, etc. — to improve the literacy rate, but in the corporate world (and its private foundations) everyone assumes governmental incompetence. It was easy to believe that fifteen million spent the right way, without governmental meddling, could be more effective than hundreds of times that amount spent — and overseen! — by professional bureaucrats.

I'm not sure how complete the foundation's scenario was when the staff made public its budding interest in writing. My guess, as I look back, is that the scenario was detailed. Those of us who were asked for advice were, I think, simply being used to make legitimate a conclusion the staff had reached before contacting a single "expert." The staff had begun with three assumptions:

1. Writing is far too important to be turned over to teachers.
2. What is needed is a K-14 curriculum that is both portable and teacher-proof. It should be adaptable enough to fit any school or college. Above all, its success must not depend on competent teachers; the role of the teacher must not exceed that of keeping students at their desks.
3. For the foundation to spend its money as it wishes, the staff must orchestrate a study of the teaching of writing from which it can construct a nationally circulated report concluding that English teachers are so confused and disorganized that hope of revitalizing them might as well be abandoned.

I attended several meetings sponsored by the foundation in 1977 and 1978. The one I remember best occurred December 30, 1978, just after the MLA Convention in New York. The foundation had decided to bring together a few of the "most prominent" members of the English discipline and a few "practitioners" (people who actually teach composition) for a high-level meeting to decide how to solve the writing crisis, and how to spend five million dollars a year for the next three years.
teach all his students to write, we could recruit community volunteers to serve as tutors. Every community has dozens of people—housewives and retired people, primarily—who are old enough to have been well educated and who would be delighted to help. I know several such people in my own neighborhood.

"We should also make clear to the university faculty that writing is not the responsibility solely of the English department. We certainly do not intend to do all of the university's dirty laundry! This year, for the first time since I've been in my department, everyone who is not on sabbatical must teach. We have no research professors. The reason is that we are swamped with thousands of illiterate students. The dean is making us pay for our literature seminars with dozens of composition courses. We cannot sit idly while the university turns us into basic skills departments. We cannot acquiesce to the mind-numbing work of the comma splice!"

Visibly excited by the threatening state of affairs, the speaker wiped his forehead with his handkerchief before concluding:

"I cannot stop before pointing out what I see as the greatest pitfall facing the English discipline. If we are not careful, a new pseudo-discipline will soon emerge. At my own university we have set up a Ph.D. specialization in rhetoric and composition. This is the worst thing that can happen. It will create a group of poorly-trained, second-class citizens who, because they have not studied literature, will not have the ear for teaching writing. Only our poorest students go into the program. Afraid that they cannot get a traditional teaching job, they hope this new program will save them. The best students, the ones who are really committed to literature and good at it, can see through the program right away.

"We must act quickly, though. The composition specialists have already begun to develop their own jargon, and there must be half a dozen new journals dedicated to so-called 'research' in the teaching of writing. This research is either foolish or extremely empirical and behavioristic. All that is needed to teach writing is close reading, attention to detail, and a manageable course load. More than that is useless!"

With that he concluded his paper and sat down. His passion had made most of us uncomfortable. No one looked him in the eye as he took his seat. The waiters came and poured coffee. Then our host stood and introduced the second speaker, the chairman of the English department at one of the distinguished Ivy League universities. He had established himself as a scholar-critic of some note in the 1960s. Recently, however, perhaps because of his administrative experience, he had begun to reevaluate his own work and even the nature of the English discipline. His critical essays published during the last three years had been repeatedly attacked during the MLA Convention. He, too, had written out his statement, but he did not stand to speak.

"My colleague's statement is a tough act to follow," he began. "It has so much the ring of righteousness to it that I'm almost afraid to differ. But differ I must. Not too long ago, members of the English discipline could be comfortable studying and interpreting the traditional canon of British and American literature. Those days are over. Nothing we can do will bring them back. Powerful forces have destroyed them.

"The first of those forces is social. The public has caught on to the fact that we have not done a good job of teaching writing. Now, the people who fund higher education demand that students be given significant, sustained instruction in composition. Administrators must find some way to meet this demand. Refusing it is unthinkable, suicidal. The dean's first inclination is to turn to English departments, where he knows exactly how to have his way. Any English department that resists a whole-
hearted commitment to teaching composition will be reduced to penury. Writing will be taught, and a lot of money will be spent on it. If literary scholars refuse to accommodate the teaching of writing, they will only be punishing themselves through their shortsightedness.

"There is a second, even more powerful, force. As a result of critical movements in Europe, especially in France, the nature of literary study is being reshaped. Though I do not expect a sudden collapse of the scholarly edifice built on formalist principles, I do think the 'age of interpretation' that characterized the mid-century has just about run its course. In spite of the protests that were so loudly raised at MLA yesterday, the nature of the critical act has changed. Derrida, Saussure, Lacan, Barthes, and others will affect criticism as dramatically as Chomsky affected linguistics. The nature of reading has changed from a search for intended meaning to a study of figurative language. We will no longer ask, 'What does The Triumph of Life mean?' The question itself is meaningless if not impertinent. Certainly it is unanswerable. Intended meaning is not just put in question; it is largely agreed to be an illusion.

"Take the example, or illusion, of characters in 'realistic' fiction. These characters are valid and functional because they replicate the conception of selfhood of their time. Yet, of course, they are only a replication; in spite of their reseeminglyness, they are unreal. They come ready to self-deconstruct. They serve an apotropic function, allowing the reader to see that selfhood itself is a fiction, not a fact. In real life, as we learned in the 1950s, selfhood can be destroyed and reconstituted: any brain can be washed clean. Fiction allows the nature of selfhood to be demystified in a safe realm, allows our hypostatized figures to be exposed. The study of 'realistic' fiction, then, like the study of all literature, becomes the study of figuration, of language use."

Appropriately unperturbed by the searching expressions and raised eyebrows of staff members and consultants alike, the speaker continued:

"Happily, these two forces that seem to be destroying us are, in fact, saving us. They are opposite sides of the same coin. If we are not obstinate in demanding that things remain as they were, the deconstruction of our discipline will lead to its reconstruction. Literature departments can, if they are intransigent, become small and peripheral, like classics departments — while large, vigorous expository writing programs flourish. Both literature and writing programs would ultimately be impoverished by such a split. Deans are by nature suspicious of literary study. They are ill-disposed to fund small courses in Chaucer or Blake. If an English department abrogates the responsibility for ensuring literacy — which every dean, like every American, conceives as the English department's function, anyway — the dean will become recalcitrant, if not hostile. By the same token, writing programs will also lose, simply because it is inconceivable that learning to write well can be separated from learning to read well. No one can possibly write better than he can read.

"The great challenge to the discipline is to integrate. I believe that this integration can be achieved by seeing both instruction in writing — or persuasion, if you will — and literary study — or the study of tropes — as symbiotic parts of modern rhetoric."

"We must recognize and steadfastly maintain that one cannot write well anything from a business letter to a technical manual until one has learned to read well the best texts available in the language. Writing teachers must learn that straightforward, referential language is an illusion. All language is figurative. The study of literature is the study of figurative language: hence, in the realm of theory, a profound reconciliation of apparent opposites; hence, I am sure, one discipline, not two.

"The problem, of course, is that the outlines of the new discipline are blurred. We need time to draw them clearly. I suggest that this foundation fund centers to allow those working in critical theory and those in writing pedagogy the time and wherewithal to reshape their discipline. The result will be a powerful, second paradigm shift and a new 'rhetorically based' discipline for the twenty-first century."

He ended his speech and reached for his coffee. Though surprised by what he had said, many of us were persuaded that a rough outline of the future lay hidden beneath the surface of his elusive vocabulary. Several of the foundation's staff members seemed especially convinced by the talk.

Again the waiters poured fresh coffee. This time they also brought small dishes of sherbert. Our host stood and introduced the third speaker. He was director of a Ph.D. program in rhetorical and composition at a large midwestern university. He had helped found an organization for composition teachers and had been director of composition at a public university in the east during the 1950s and 1960s. Remaining seated and speaking without notes, he leaned back on two legs of his chair as he talked.

"I'm glad you invited me to this dinner," he said with a smile. "I haven't been to an MLA Convention since I was a graduate student, and it's nice to return to Never-Never Land. I'm more pleased than I can tell you that I find myself agreeing with my distinguished colleagues. Naturally, I don't agree completely, but I find that much of what they say is true.

"My colleague from the West Coast suggests that teaching writing is no more the English Department's responsibility than anyone else's. More importantly, writing should not be taught at the university level at all, but in the schools. Both of those points are well-taken, and on the surface difficult to dispute. I suppose their blatantly obvious stupidity makes them seem so logical.

"It has been about ten years since English professors convinced their colleagues in other departments that composition was not the English department's responsibility and that freshman composition should be abolished since all high school graduates could write anyway. We all know the results of that reform. Did we really think philosophers and historians — let alone chemists, engineers, and sociologists — would, or even could, teach writing? Good Lord! We just wanted to teach seminars in Milton, and there were plenty of students.

"The second assumption, though, is even more ridiculous than the first. How in the name of all that's holy is a man who has never taught in a high school and who has taught only two composition courses in his entire life, both twenty years ago, going to make sure that tenth grade teachers know what they are doing? The idea is just silly."

The professor from the West Coast squirmed, and the rest of us were a little embarrassed as the speaker continued:

"I was startled when my colleague from the East suggested that we redefine English departments as rhetoric departments. Three or four of us lost souls have advocated that for about twenty-five years now. But, I must say, the rhetoric department he envisions would surely be the oddest one thought up since Corax of Syracuse first began dispensing rhetorical theory two and a half millennia ago.

"Before I explain, I'll make an important point. There are about 2,000 colleges and universities and another 1,000 or so two-year colleges in the U.S. About 300 of these institutions have English Departments that are really literature departments, and about half of these three hundred are at research universities where the tenured faculty is supported by 75-200 graduate stu-
udents who teach hundreds of composition courses. The other 150 are at very expensive, small, highly selective, private liberal arts colleges that still use literary analysis as the freshman writing program. The remaining 2,700 institutions have composition departments and nothing more. Ninety-five percent of what they do is what we used to call ‘service.’ Take away ‘service,’ and nothing would remain.

“Clearly we don’t need to ‘create’ rhetoric departments. Most places have them already. We need to begin studying the theory that supports these already existing departments. But these real rhetoric departments resemble my famous colleague’s proposed department only in name. Note the marriage of convenience that he described: Composition, because that is where the students are, is rich in dollars; literary theory, because that is where the brains are, is rich in theory. Isn’t there any theory on the composition side? Of course. And it’s older, going back almost 3,000 years, and richer, including far more world-class thinkers, than the tradition of critical theory. What’s more, it is just more interesting right now than literary study. The kids in our graduate program are the brightest and best I’ve ever met. The ones in our literature program walk around like observers at a wake.

“I also agree that English departments should be reading departments. But in agreeing, again I must disagree. When my colleague says ‘reading well,’ he doesn’t mean reading for comprehension. He means interpreting (whether deconstructionist or formalistically) the ‘privileged texts’ of the Anglo-American tradition. He seems unaware that such ‘reading’ depends on someone else’s teaching people to read for comprehension first, usually someone heavily influenced by B. F. Skinner.

“I must take issue with him on another point. He says there is no such thing as straightforward, referential language. Such an inanity could be uttered only by a literary theorist so besotted with his own cleverness that he has lost his hold on reality entirely. Even the famous ‘Private Members Only’ sign on the Johns Hopkins Faculty Club door is clear, unmistakable, straightforward, referential prose. No one could misunderstand it, not even a critical theorist. Of course it is possible to play games with what it might mean. But that doesn’t change what it does mean.

“But, yes, I do agree that English departments ought to be departments of rhetorical study. Some of the tenured faculty should be specialists in the history of rhetorical theory; others, specialists in reading, the way Frank Smith and Yetta Goodman are; still others, specialists in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. There ought to be a specialist in business and technical writing and one in creative writing. Yes, there even ought to be a specialist in British literature and perhaps two in American literature—this being America and all. And I steadfastly maintain that these last three should not be amateurs brought in from the community!

“What needs to be done cannot be done by this foundation alone and certainly not with a piddling fifteen million. What is required is a full-blown revolution. The foundation could begin the revolution by funding institutes to reeducate the faculty in strategically-placed English departments. The institutes would offer training in rhetorical history and theory, pedagogy, and linguistics and could be run by the small cadre of modern rhetoricians that have developed in the last few years. It would not be difficult to make the institutes work.

“To be awarded an institute, a university would have to agree to the following: After the institute, only faculty members who have participated and passed a qualifying exam could teach composition. After all, the present faculty became qualified to teach literature by taking courses and passing exams; why not do the same for composition? Of course, the department chairman would not be able to fill out the Chaucer specialist’s schedule with a couple of composition classes, unless the Chaucer specialist had qualified to teach writing courses. If the Blake could make and the Blakean had not qualified, the chairman could not give him one of the freshman composition courses listed as ‘staff.’ Maybe the displaced Blakean could teach a math course or become an assistant coach on the women’s basketball team. Or maybe the dean could just pay him to sit home and read Tiraah. But he wouldn’t teach composition anymore.”

Finally, the speaker leaned forward and grasped his water glass. He was finished. The gauntlet had been dropped. He had taken away our breath, as he had intended to do. The host rose before the completely silent group and introduced the fourth speaker, who was much younger than the other three. He has since become director of a new graduate program in rhetoric and composition at an eastern university. At the time, he was director of freshman composition at a major southern university. He was, in fact, a graduate of the program headed by the third speaker. He began with an apology:

“It grows late so I will try to be brief. Most of us have been through three days of papers, and following such a fine meal and such good port, four speeches may be one too many.

“I agree with most of what my mentor has said. Certainly I am insulted by insinuations that my area of specialization is no area at all, that those who do what I do are dismissed and cowardly. I am also insulted by the reductionist view of composition that attributes all the theory to the literati and all the grunt work to the composition specialists. To my surprise, however, it is at the level of theory that I must differ with my former teacher. Unquestionably, there have been an explosion of research on composition and an accompanying rash of publications.

1978, composition theorists produced as many new articles on composition as critics produced on Chaucer; by 1980, the number of articles on composition will equal the number on Shakespeare; and by 1990, the corpus of new composition theory will perhaps equal that of new criticism on all of English and American literature. There is plenty of theory out there. And that is my greatest concern. Let me explain by analogy to literature.

“I realized something startling about six months ago. Now it seems almost like a revelation. No one doubts the existence of a genuine discipline associated with studying English and American literature. The literati look down on composition specialists because we lack theory because writing, the real stuff, cannot be taught. Why has it never occurred to anyone that the entire literature establishment is an utter, unmitigated flop? Almost everybody in America has been introduced to literature, dozens of times, by dozens of literary specialists, all of whose credentials are in good order. The upshot of all these courses taught by well-trained critics is that virtually no one outside an English department reads any literature. Ever! Try to find one person in your neighborhood who has read a privileged text since leaving school. Americans despise and abhor the very thought of literature. And what is the cause of this atitude? A decadent, materialistic, slovenly society? No way. It’s literature teachers.

“If the purpose of all these courses in literature is to show students how enjoyable and satisfying reading can be, then we have before us a social program whose absurdity failure makes the failure of the Vietnamese village pacification program pale into insignificance. All those millions of contact hours and billions of dollars spent to introduce students to literature have had exactly the same effect on the American public as antabuse has had on alcoholics.

“Theory may make a discipline legitimate, but I am not sure
theory makes it accessible, or useful. I have read most of the publications on composition in the last ten years. A good number are interesting; a few are brilliant. I cannot guarantee, however, that students taught by professors acquainted with all this new knowledge will write better than those taught by professors ignorant of it. The process of writing is so complex that no one has any real idea how it works. For a long time to come, anecdotal research will be much more useful than ‘scientific’ research. It would be a shame if we created a new department of rhetorical studies whose net effect was to accomplish what literary theory has accomplished for the reading of literature. We do not need 60,000 rhetoric professors writing back and forth to each other in a language comprehensible to no one else and using a jargon that makes students shut their ears and run away. Worse yet, it would be a lie to pretend that we have anything more than vague hunches about the writing process. At least some students learn to write through our present methods. Let’s not perfect our theory so that no one at all learns.”

Then the speaker turned to our host.

“I assume that your foundation wants to use its money to improve instruction in writing, not to facilitate a generation of new scholars who need an opportunity to play the career game. There is something that you could do. Although it would not be revolutionary, it would do much good. The foundation should fund semester-long seminars in writing management to train directors of freshman composition programs. Though the seminars would include some readings in and discussion of recent theories in the teaching of writing, their primary purpose would be to teach participants how to manage one of the large writing programs that characterize most colleges. The seminar leaders would include academic administrators, systems analysts, word processing specialists, computer experts, and organizational psychologists. Graduates would learn how to develop a standard syllabus acceptable to a broad range of instructors, how to make the course goals and procedures relatively uniform from section to section, and, above all, how to get a diverse department to agree on methods and criteria of evaluation.”

He ended his speech and put his arm around his former mentor, who was sitting beside him. There was a short silence, and then our host suggested that we open the floor for discussion. Though it was late, the discussion lasted for more than an hour. The respondents grilled all four speakers, but their positions remained unchanged. About midnight, the Vice-President thanked us for our help and wished us a happy New Year.

Nearly a year later, after I had completely forgotten about the meeting, I received the foundation’s report. The conclusions were these:

1. The English discipline is incompetent and irresponsible.
2. We have decided to fund a group of educational theorists who live and work abroad.
3. We hope to produce a curriculum design that will not depend on the competence of individual teachers.

As soon as I can afford to, I will send the foundation a check for $525 to repay my honorarium and to cover the cost of my dinner on December 30, 1978.

The Composing Process: What We Know/What We Tell Our Students

Lisa S. Ede
SUNY College at Brockport

What do we know about the composing process? Until recently, any informed teacher or scholar would have answered “very little indeed.” This certainly has been true of one kind of knowledge — that contributed by sophisticated empirical and theoretical research. Fortunately, during the past few years this dismal situation has begun to change. There is another kind of knowledge, however, one that has been available to us all along — what we learn from our own experiences as writers. In this paper I will focus on the relationship between these two equally critical kinds of knowledge.

Although current research on the composing process is rather primitive — with huge territories still relatively unexplored and standards of method and evidence often problematic — certain generalizations seem to hold. The following writers may disagree on particulars, but their descriptions of the general shape of the composing process are surprisingly consistent:

[The composing process] moves forward and backward between synthesis and analysis. How often this recycling occurs depends on the writer’s commitment, preparation, and time limitations.

Stage process models have little to say about the act of writing itself because they are based not on a study of the process of writing but the product. . . . If we were to study the composing process from the inside perspective we would see that the tasks of planning, retrieving information, creating new ideas, producing language, and revising it are all intimately and rather untidily organized together.

As one composes, one is simultaneously forced into a multiplicity of roles — writer, reader, discoverer, censor, critic, editor; ideas are constantly being defined, selected, rejected, evaluated, organized.

The implications of changing our conception of the composing process from that of a fairly rigid sequence of clearly demarcated stages to a more recursive, hierarchically structured activity are immense. Obviously, caution in interpreting results is necessary. Even at this early point, however, it seems clear — to me, at least — that one of the most serious effects of the current-traditional model of the composing process has been its negative influence on students’ expectations and attitudes. Suppose you had been given the following advice, all gleaned from textbooks currently in use, and had believed it?

If a writer knows what he wants to do in a piece of writing and how to do it, this sense of purpose will lead to the right choices.

Revision is a process which comes at the end of theme writing.

Although a short, informal theme can sometimes be written from a few brief jottings, most papers require a more disciplined outline.

You will start by learning how to find a thesis, which will virtually organize your essay for you. . . . If you do not find a thesis, your essay will be a tour through the miscellaneous.

What does such advice tell students, implicitly, about the composing process? All the real, tough work seems to occur at the beginning, before you begin to write. If you can only "find" the “right” thesis — a process which must strike students as something akin to salvation by grace alone — then everything
else will be easy. After that, it's a matter of sticking to your outline and saving an hour or so at the end to tidy things up. (Tellingly, for all our emphasis on getting ideas "right" from the very first, until recently we've ignored the role of invention in writing.)

Students who believe what we have told them about composing yet fail to approximate it in their own experience must feel that they are burdened with some secret sin which prevents them from gaining access to this obviously semi-divine process. Students who don't believe us, who know that the neat headings ("find your thesis, sharpen your thesis, believe in your thesis," etc.) in the margins of their text have nothing to do with the way most people write, probably become, if they are able, masters of the canned essay, of English.

Either way, their naive, rigid conception of the composing process has potentially destructive results. In an important study of the revision strategies of students and experienced writers, for example, Nancy Sommers found that the students' conception of the writing process clearly influenced their revising habits—largely in negative ways: "Because they do not see revision as an activity on the idea level, and because they feel that 'conception' precedes in a literal way 'production,' and that they must know before writing what they want to say, they thus feel [that] if they know what they want to say, then there is little reason for making changes." Sommers goes on to argue that the linear model "functions to restrict and circumscribe not only the development of their ideas, but also their ability to change the direction of these ideas." This linear approach is in distinct contrast to the strategies of professional writers, whose revising Sommers describes as a "recursive process with different levels of attention and different agenda for each cycle."

II

It seems, then, that students do have assumptions about the composing process—assumptions derived from our textbooks and our teaching—and that these may often impede, rather than improve, their chances of writing well. What can we do about this? Although anyone who has surveyed our current crop of textbooks realizes that most need major revision, we must be wary: canonizing a new model of the composing process too quickly could be just as damaging as leaving texts exactly as they are. For though, as I have argued, the general shape of a model seems to be emerging, a great deal of research remains before we can describe it with much precision or authority. Cooper and Odell's Research on Composing: Points of Departure, for example, is a vast compendium of unanswered questions about the composing process.

And many difficult pedagogical questions remain. How can we teach a complex process without oversimplifying? What is the difference between simplifying and oversimplifying? How do we teach what seems to be a non-linear, recursive, hierarchically ordered process within the very linear time constraints of the number of minutes in a classroom period, the number of sessions in a term? Even if we reach some degree of consensus on a model of the composing process, these and related pedagogical problems will continue to demand our attention.

This is precisely where the significance of the second kind of knowledge I mentioned earlier—our experiential knowledge as writers, our personal knowledge (as Michael Polanyi would say)—becomes clear. I do not intend to diminish the importance of work on the composing process, which is one of the most critical areas of research in composition studies today, when I agree with Michael Polanyi that no methodology or model, however rigorous and explicit, will ever be able to specify fully a complex activity such as writing.

Although I do not entirely agree with Polanyi's statement that "all arts are learned by intelligently imitating the way they are practised by other persons in whom the learner places his confidence," I do believe that the teacher's function as a role model is critical. This does not mean that students should slavishly ape their teacher's style. Rather, it implies that the teacher demonstrate to students how one acts who cares deeply about language and writing—what questions she asks, how he approaches a difficult problem. When our students come to us from a largely visual, rather than a literary, society such a function may become particularly central.

III

There are a number of specific methods which teachers can use to introduce students to the composing process. These represent attempts, first of all, to enrich their assumptions about the process of writing, to give them a more accurate sense of its general shape. Because empirical and theoretical knowledge is still incomplete, I always speak tentatively, urging students to develop working hypotheses based not only on our class discussions, but on their own experiences and those of their peers as well. I also emphasize the enormous variety of particular, or local, strategies that individual writers use, encouraging them to become more introspective about their own writing habits so they can begin to make discriminations about what does and does not work for them.

The most general strategy, as I have suggested, is to present yourself as a working writer—or more accurately, to be a working writer. This doesn't mean that you have to write fiction, poetry, or professional articles. As we so often tell our students, anyone who writes letters, memos, reports, proposals, etc., is a writer. I don't talk about my writing very often, just when it seems relevant. I try to emphasize that I consider myself "in process," improving in some ways, still confused and uncertain in others, just like my students.

For the past two years I have written a retrospective protocol, or analysis, of most of my important writing experiences. To do so I jot notes about what seems to be happening as I write and try to keep my scraps and drafts in order. After the project is completed, I describe and comment on the whole process. It's also possible to use a tape recorder as you write; this is the technique researchers such as Linda Flower and John Hayes employ in their research. Such a method is impractical for most composing; however, it can be quite instructive as a one-time experiment.

When I share these experiences with my students they are at first shocked, and then greatly relieved, to learn that my composing process varies so much from the neat and tidy stages of the model they have been taught. They're often amazed, and even frightened, by how much energy and hard work can go into even a brief paper. But I think they also feel that they may not after all be eternally excluded from this difficult and complex but also, as I bear witness, most rewarding activity.

Several times I have been able to comment with particular thoroughness on my scraps, notes, and drafts as I composed, and thus could not only write a more than usually complete protocol, but also refer directly to my messy pile of papers. It's worth it, I think, to take a whole class period some time and try to go through a particular writing experience for students. You can use the thermofax to make copies of all or parts of your drafts or, more efficiently perhaps, use an overhead projector.

An obvious offshoot would be to have class members upon occasion write brief retrospective protocols of their own composing
processes. It might also be helpful to have students, especially advanced students, once or twice keep everything they write for a specific essay. The teacher and the student might then be able to analyze the "evidence," trying to see where the writer seems to be working effectively, and where he or she seems to be using limited strategies. Students working in small groups could also perform similar kinds of analysis. Other methods: reading anecdotes by professional writers about their writing habits; asking ordinary people whose careers involve a fair amount of writing (other teachers, lawyers, businessmen, etc.) to talk to your students; writing on the same topic you've assigned to your students or, if you don't assign specific topics, working under the same time constraints, and sharing the results.

Perhaps most important, but hardest to discuss, is the need for flexibility and common sense. I have told my students, for example, that I've written papers at the last moment. Still do. But I also tell them that it took years before I could predict when such delaying tactics constituted a reasonable, even highly effective method, given the constraints on my energy and time, and when it was the kind of procrastination that left me desperate at 3 AM with coffee nerves and a blank page. My general advice is still the same: given their situation, I urge them to begin their papers early. I think they may finally have greater respect for that caution, and be able to apply it more fruitfully, because they realize that we share a common experience.

I never argue with success: anything that works works. As I constantly remind my students, however, some strategies are clearly easier on mind and body, as well as more productive in the long run, than others. Thus I warn students against cultivating composing habits which are functional in certain limited circumstances, but which may finally prove crippling. The rare freshman who announces that he or she has always gotten his writing out the night before his assignments are due needs to be persuaded that although such a practice may work when the assignment is brief, the student may discover that he or she will be incapable of dealing with longer, more complex projects such as term papers and reports.

A friend and much-respected colleague, Sam Watson, Jr., has said: "As we ask ever more intently what it is we know about writing as product, as process . . . we may find it increasingly difficult to specify what we do know, and we might even convince ourselves that we know less and less, rather like the rifleman who scares so intently at his target that it disappears." Recent concern with research on the composing process represents one of the most positive trends in composition studies, in, I would venture to say, decades. We need to support this research, study it, test it against our own experiences, apply it in our classrooms. At the same time, however, we must not underestimate or underutilize our own personal knowledge, our own experiences as writers and as teachers of writing.

This is far from easy. There is much in our present educational system which militates against the kind of development of personal expertise and involvement with students that I have been advocating — the large number of composition classes that too many of us teach; our TA system, which often pushes students into teaching before they have had even a semblance of adequate training; our increasing dependency upon and exploitation of part-time staff, the still fairly low regard with which composition teaching is held by our profession as a whole. As difficult as this is, we need to maintain a double focus: we need to continue struggling to advance our empirical and theoretical knowledge of the composing process, yet not forget the importance of both nurturing and sharing our own personal knowledge of the very art that we propose to teach. Only thus can we avoid becoming living exemplars of the maxim that "those that can, do; and those that can't, teach."

NOTES
8 Baker, pp. 2-4.
9 Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers." Paper presented at the 1978 MLA convention in New York City, p. 5.
10 Sommers, "Revision Strategies," p. 5.
14 Sharon Crowley had her students keep what she calls composition diaries. See her article in CCC, cited above, as well as Nancy Sommers' response, also cited above.
15 Donald Murray's recent article, "Write Before Writing," in the December, 1978, issue of CCC (pp. 375-81) is an excellent example of the insights that can result when a person with these rare qualities looks at writing.

The Writing Process: Core of the Writing Program
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In 1975, James Britton and others involved in a Schools Council research project at the University of London criticized "the 'four modes of discourse' with their long history and ex cathedra tradition":

What . . . are the shortcomings of the rhetorical categories? First, it should be noted that they are derived from an examination of the finished products of professional writers . . . The tradition is profoundly prescriptive and shows little inclination to observe the writing process: its concern is with how people should write, rather than with how they do.1

Speaking that same year at the Buffalo Conference on Researching Composing, Richard E. Young leveled a similar criticism at the "current-traditional paradigm" which dominates the teaching of writing.
The overt features of current-traditional rhetoric are obvious enough: the emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs; the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); the preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper; and so on... the tendency of current-traditional rhetoric [is] to become a critical study of the products of composing and an art of editing.  

And in 1977, Mina Shaughnessy explained how instructional emphasis on the products of composing causes problems for student writers. "The beginning writer does not know how writers behave," Shaughnessy notes. And so, he or she "usually perceives writing as a single act, a gamble with words, rather than a deliberate process whereby meaning is crafted stage by stage. Indeed, beginning writers often blame themselves for having to revise or correct sentences or for taking a long time to get started or even for not being able to start at all — problems only too familiar to the professional writer as well." Shaughnessy also writes that "teachers themselves promote this narrow and inhibiting view of perfection by ignoring all stages of the writing process except the last, where form correctness becomes important, and by confronting students with models of good writing by well-known writers without ever mentioning the messy process that leads to clarity" (p. 79).

The statements by Britton, Young, and Shaughnessy suggest that composition courses often give too little attention to the process of writing and too much emphasis to forms of discourse, conventions of usage, and other features of written artifacts. They suggest, I think, an important change that composition teachers, writing directors, and department heads need to make in the teaching of writing. Instead of continuing the "ex cathedra tradition" of the four modes of discourse and emphasizing "critical study of the products of composing," the composition course should be made, to use Mina Shaughnessy's words, "the place where the writers not only write but experiences in a conscious, orderly way the stages of the composing process itself" (p. 81).

Individual teachers seeking to convert their classes to such places (as many teachers have done in the past few years) easily can locate suggestions about how to engage students, mindfully, in the writing process. "Imagination and Discipline in the Writing Class" (English Journal, Dec. 1977) sketches sixteen activities I have found helpful in building student awareness of process and helping students generate material, draft papers, and revise drafts. Carl Koch and James Brazil's Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process (NCTE, 1978) offers detailed suggestions, including twelve on Prewriting, five on Writing, and six on Postwriting. In "Kenneth Burke and the Teaching of Writing" (College Composition and Communication, Dec. 1978), Joseph Comprone outlines ways to apply Burke's theories to various stages of the writing process. And Anthony Petrosky and James Brozick summarize a wide range of theory and research as they develop "A Model for Teaching Writing Based Upon Current Knowledge of the Composing Process" (English Journal, Jan. 1979).

In their private preparations, teachers can read such materials, and they can turn to a wide range of other resources including The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), Robert Zoellner's A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition (College English, Jan. 1969), Janet Emig's The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (NCTE, 1971), Richard Young's chapter on "Invention" in Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographical Essays (Texas Christian University Press, 1976), John Warnock's "New Rhetoric and the Grammar of Pedagogy" (Freshman English News, Fall, 1976), Mina Shaughnessy's chapter "Beyond the Sentence" in Errors and Expectations, Ann Berthoff's "Towards a Pedagogy of Knowing" (Freshman English News, Spring 1978) and "Tolstoy, Vygotsky, and the Making of Meaning" (College Composition and Communication, Oct. 1978), and Charles Cooper and Lee Odell's Research on Composing: Points of Departure (NCTE, 1978). And for public use in their classes, teachers can choose from a growing number of texts that emphasize the writing process. (Among such books are Ken Macrorie's Telling Writing, W. Ross Winterrowd's The Contemporary Writer, Susan Miller's Writing: Process and Product, Frank D'Angelo's Process and Thought in Composition, Quentin Gehle and Duncan Rollo's The Writing Process, and Ann M. Berthoff's Forming Thinking Writing: The Composing Imagination.)

Interested teachers, then, can draw on many theoretical discussions and concrete suggestions to help them move the process of writing into their classes. And if my contacts with teachers are any indication, many teachers are working, as individuals, to stress the dynamic process of writing-in-the-making rather than static "rules" or abstract analyses of professional models. What is far more difficult, though, is to try to move writing as a process to the center of a college writing program staffed by a variety of faculty members and teaching assistants; the contradictory ideas individual teachers have about the writing process can frustrate unified course development. And so can a needless block that comes from the way we English teachers often talk about the process of writing.

It is possible, though, for teachers whose ideas of the composing process are as far apart as those of Ray Kytle and Peter Elbow to agree that writing is a process (of some kind) by which writing grows so that initial ideas and sentences become more complex, coherent, convincing, and clear. Of course, some teachers will continue to believe that this process should be taught by emphasizing thoughts, and others will want to stress the physical behaviors involved in writing. Still, teachers of the mental process group know that they can sit down at a typewriter and write — thoughts developing as fingers fly. And those of a more behavioral persuasion can remember times when a thesis, transition, or especially effective phrase clicked into place while they were mowing the lawn or brushing their teeth. So I think it is possible for teachers, regardless of their specific doctrines about writing process, to be ecumenical enough to understand and sympathize with each other's views.

This ecumenical spirit, however, often has a difficult time developing, because of a widespread terminology problem within our profession — that triple-headed cliché, Pre-Writing, Writing, and Re-Writing. These terms have been used so often by conference speakers and authors of articles and texts that they have become code-words, if not universally understood and believed in, at least almost universally recognized. And the meaning that these code-words carry is that there is a sharp separation between certain activities that are writing from other activities — fore and aft — that are not writing. What else is a teacher to make of Gordon Holman's analysis of the writing process —"we divided the process at the point where the 'writing idea' is ready for the words and the page: everything before that we called 'pre-Writing,' everything after 'Writing' and 'Re-Writing'?" Similar most teachers will carry a sharp sense of separation between mental and scribal activities away from much systematic research of composing processes — for instance, Sharon Pianko's recent identification of pre-writing ("what occurs from the moment
writers receive the assignment until they put their first words on paper”) as an activity distinct from composing (“what occurs between the writing of the first word on paper and the final stopping of writing”).

Our profession contains many teachers who agree with the separation of mental preparation from the production of the written text — with the idea that, to use Kyrle’s words again, “before you can begin to write on a subject, you must discover what you want to say about it.” But the profession also contains those who feel, with Barrett Mandel, that writing “is not a transcription of thoughts already held in the mind” and that “it is the act of writing that produces the discoveries which will, in fact, be read by others.”

And the writing director who uses the code-word “pre-writing” to identify the early stage of composition may well alienate staff members who approach writing more behaviorally, and make it even more difficult to move writing process to the center of the writing program.

This, of course, is the needless block I think needs to be removed. And it can be removed because it is a problem of terminology more than substance. When you re-write a draft of an article, do you not think of yourself as writing? When you sit down to plan a course or compose a memo, do you not reach, pretty quickly, for a pen and start to scratch down notes to yourself? If you are like most English teachers I know, you probably answered “yes” to both questions. For when writing teachers move away from the technical vocabulary of our profession and think of writing in everyday terms, most of us sense that writing is a broad activity that puts ideas and typewriters in close harness.

In fact, this common-sense idea of writing has seeped into our technical vocabulary too, so that we often use the term, “pre-writing” to mean something different from what, on the face of it, the term means. For example, Maxine Hairston’s A Contemporary Rhetoric uses “prewriting” as a synonym for “preparation,” a part of the writing process during which, besides thinking, students “start taking notes, writing down thoughts as fast as they come and not worrying about order or form.” Or consider the excellent third chapter in W. Ross Winterrowd’s The Contemporary Writer (Harcourt, 1975). Here Winterrowd introduces brainstorming on paper, Kenneth Burke’s Pentad, and Richard Larson’s Problem Solving and Questioning strategies as ways for writers to generate material early in the writing process. But while these techniques often involve the physical act of writing, the title of the chapter is “Prewriting.” Sandra Schor and Judith Fishman, to use one more example, begin The Random House Guide to Basic Writing (Random House, 1978) with a chapter recommending behavioral, free writing concepts to help students generate subject matter. Then, in chapter two, they introduce pre-writing as an alternate way to invent ideas before the essay itself begins to take shape. The confusion of terminology involved in placing pre-writing a chapter later than free writing is clear. And the confusion seems even greater when you realize that among the pre-writing strategies of chapter two are such scribal activities as Focused Free Writing, the Underlining of Important Sentences, Journal Writing, and the Writing of Lists.

In practical terms, then, “pre-writing” seems to be a label for what occurs while writers search for ideas and connections early in the writing game. It can happen while one puffs a pipe thoughtfully or drowzes mindlessly in a hot tub. But this early coping for material also can take place while a writer tries — consciously and physically — to get words on paper. And so what most teachers mean when they say “pre-writing” really is not antagonistic to the approach Peter Elbow describes in Writing Without Teachers: “a rambling process with lots of writing and lots of throwing away” by which you “can work up to what you really want to say and how you want to say it” (pp. 15-16).

The spirit of Elbow’s sentence, and the instructional attempt to loosen students up so that ideas can get on paper, really are quite close to the spirit and instructional motives of most teachers who talk about “pre-writing.” So I suppose we could change the term slightly to say that there are two kinds of pre-writing — one that takes place before a person writes and one that happens while a person writes. That probably is an accurate reflection of what most teachers mean by pre-writing. It also sounds a little silly.

It seems clear to me, then, that if English staffs or writing directors want to make the process of writing the center of writing courses, we first need to find a less loaded and confusing terminology than pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. We need to use “writing” as the name for the whole process — from initial thought or random scribbles through final proof reading. For instance, I use the terms, “Generating and Focusing,” “Drafting,” and “Revising” — with “focusing” something that can occur either mentally on paper (or both), “drafting” an activity that can result from prior thought or be the stimulator of ideas, and “revising” something that happens whenever the eye looks back over what the hand has written.

Specific terminology for the activities of composing are important because they enable our composition programs to embody the complexity and wholeness of writing. And to do this, we need to move away from simple, linear models — such as pre-writing, writing, re-writing — and toward the richer, more dynamic view Nancy I. Sommers has described:

... the conception of the writer moving in a series of nonlinear movements from one sub-process to another while he/she constantly moves the force of his/her attention among matters of content, style, and structure, solving continuous sets and sub-sets of complex cognitive, lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical problems. It is not that a writer merely conceives of an idea, lets it incubate, and then produces it, but rather that ideas are constantly being defined and redefined, selected and rejected, evaluated and organized.

NOTES

6 Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process,” College Composition and Communication, 16 (May 1965), 106.
7 "A Description of the Composing Processes of College Freshman Writers," Research in the Teaching of English, 13 (Feb. 1979), 7. Pianko’s handling of planning in her research design shows how completely she separates mental preparation from scribal activity: “If a student did some mental planning prior to composing, it was classified as prewriting time. Planning done in writing, (e.g., an outline) was included in composing time” (p. 9).
Travels by a Composition Teacher

Linda Woodson
Texas Tech University

The Author permitted to see the Grand Academy of Composition. The Academy largely described. The Arts wherein the professors employ themselves. The Author proposes some improvements, which are less than honourably received.

I landed at the shore; whereafter I was taken to the house of the King. He related a discourse to me to this effect. That about ten years ago, certain persons went up to Academia, either upon business or diversion, and, after four years continuance, came back with a very little smattering in the art of composition. That these persons upon their return began to complain of their inability to write well and to publish treatises on "Why Josiah Cannot Write," and to fall into schemes for putting the art of composition on a new footing. To this end they erected an Academy of Composition; and the humour prevailed so strongly among the people, that there is not a town of any consequence in the kingdom without such an academy. In these colleges, the professors contrive new rules and methods of teaching composition, whereby all men will be able to write well.

As a great admirer of projects, and a person of much curiosity, I was permitted to visit such an Academy; for I had myself been a sort of experimenter in those directions.

The Academy was not all in one building, but resembled a series of glass houses set high upon a hill. At the entrance to one of the glass buildings, I was received very kindly by the Director of Composition. We proceeded down a long corridor and entered first a common room where three professors sat reading student writing and discussing its need for improvement.

First professor: "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you first this piece of reflexive discourse for your observation. This encoder is clearly a victim of a restricted code. There seems to be no evidence of communicative competence at all."

Second professor: "I see what you mean. The poor writer's code is restricted to a string of constative utterances with an occasional attempt at ejaculative discourse thrown in. The communicative efficiency of this code is quite, quite minimal. I have counted the number of T-units and the attempts at semantic closure, and I must conclude that the relative readability of this discourse is very low indeed. I think, however, if you can find a way to increase the encoder's use of proleptic devices, you will have made a first step toward the improvement of syntactic maturity and toward giving the encoder access to an elaborated code."

Third professor: "Ah, do not despair, esteemed colleagues, for here I present to you an interesting example of a student who evidences remarkable ability to store meaningful semantic units and to internalize the patterns presented by her text. I must humbly admit that the communications skills model I am employing is having happy results. When this particular student made her first pitiable attempts at phatic utterances, there was little evidence that her learning had proceeded much beyond the stage of the manipulative domain. Her skills in the cognitive domain were sadly absent. Through the use of a protocol, I was able to ascertain the level of symbolic representation that she had achieved and with auto-instructional learning devices, she has made rapid progress."

First professor: "Perhaps so, perhaps so. I still notice, however, that the semantic closures in the writing pay little heed to the STM (short-term memory, you know) of the decoder; nonetheless, she has made strides toward encoding semantic units into syntactic forms."

Second professor: "Just listen to this little bit of performative utterance. It is incomprehensible to me how with all our strides in software engineering, we are still unable to understand why an encoder during the scribal act is so unaware of the effect that the code is going to have upon the decoder. Perhaps if I transfer my attention from the scribal modality to the behavioral modality, I will be able to increase the learner's syntactic fluency."

I must admit I was but ill entertained, the professors appearing in my judgment to be borrowing unhappily the language of psychologists and sociolinguists and applying that language invidiously, a scene that never fails to make me melancholy.

But, however, I would not do justice to the Academy to pretend that all of the professors were engaged in such airy pursuits. For as we passed farther down the hall, I heard two professors discussing their proposal for increasing syntactic maturity, and thereby, communicative competence among men and women. They were of the opinion that the relative readability of a writer's sample could be determined by counting the embedded clauses of the writing and comparing that number to the number of embedded clauses in the writing of professionals; they were at that point up to seven thousand, seven hundred and ninety-nine in Look Homeward Angel.

Still farther down the hall, I looked into a room where a professor was presenting to the students a list of five hundred questions covering what might be said about any subject at all.

The whole scene left me confused, and I ventured to speak to the professors of what I had observed in my travels about composition classes made up of discoverers, informers, evidencers, together in the process of learning to write. I told them that in these classes it is first agreed that the purpose of being together is the improvement of writing; then, effectual care is taken to secure writing. This writing is delivered to instructors very dexterous in finding out the meanings of words, syllables, and letters. For instance, the instructors can discover a "close'nt" to signify "does not"; they can determine a topic sentence such as "Education will be important to me in my future life" to need much specifying; and they understand a statement like "Women burning their bras and shedding their womanhood are doing nothing but destroying any chance of salvation for future generations of non-libbers" to be the ardent statement of a student who needs more time in the world.

The professors made me little acknowledgement for communicating these observations, and said that in the world of constraints, competence, and codification, my remarks would be considered totally naive.

I saw nothing in this Academy that could invite me to stay and began to think of returning home.

Thus, gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travel to the Academy. I could probably have charmed thee with improbable tales, but I chose rather to inform than to amuse.
thee. It is easy for us to travel to remote countries and to recount the wonders there seen. Whereas a traveller's chief aim should be to make men and women wiser by bad as well as good example. I am not a little pleased that this work can meet with no objection; for what censorship can be made against a writer who relates only plain fact?

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