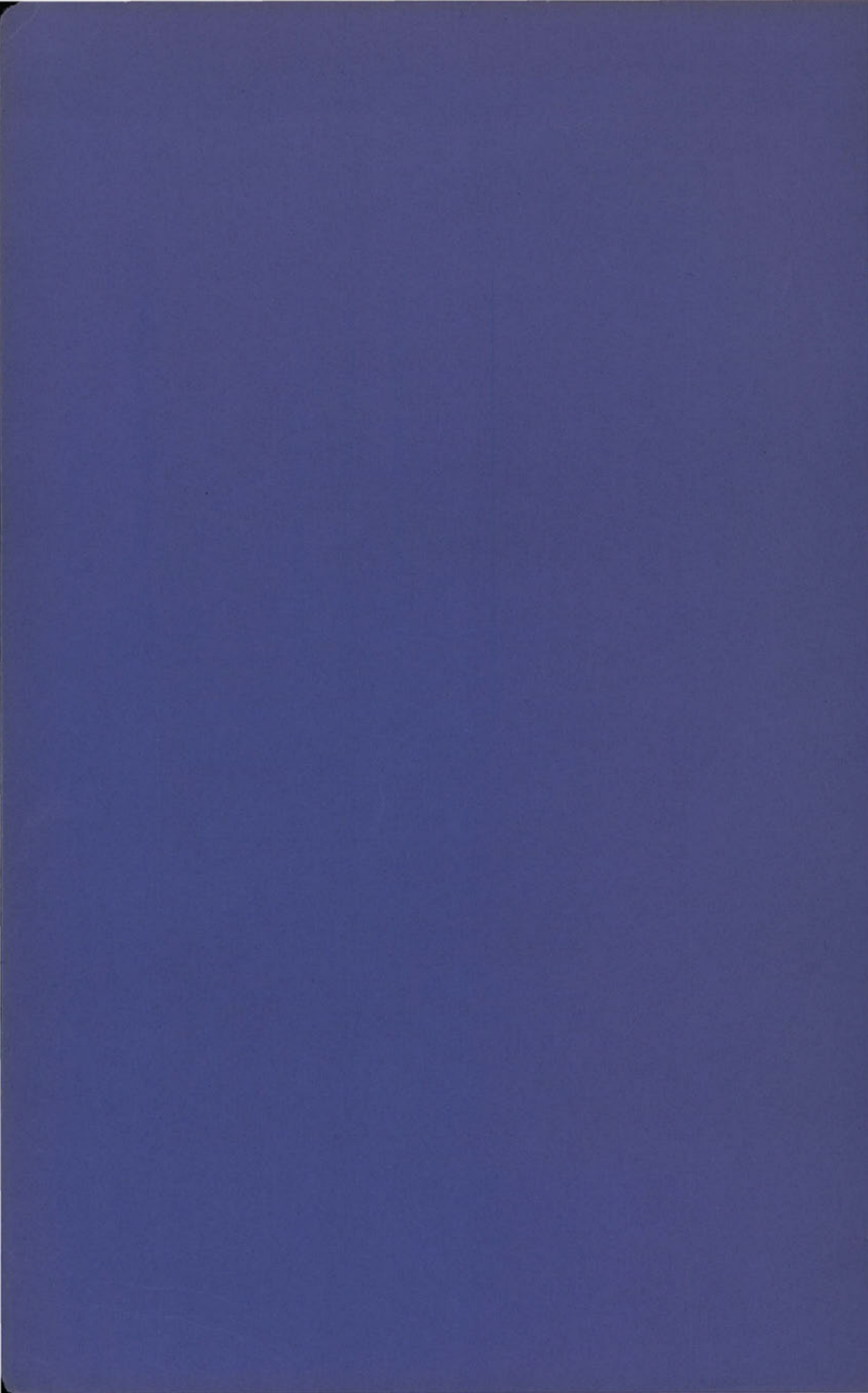


# BASIC WRITING

FALL/WINTER 1976

2. COURSES



# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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## COURSES

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## INTRODUCTION

There was a time in France, we are told, when it was possible to say at any given point during the day what every schoolboy in the country was reading. However enviable such curricular certainty might seem to Basic Writing teachers in this country during these times, it is clearly not at this point remotely possible. As yet, the teaching of writing to unprepared college freshmen is too loose and unstudied an experience to allow for uniformity even within programs, let alone among them. Colleges define “basic” differently, depending on the skills levels of their “regular” students; budgets for basic writing range widely from campus to campus, with some large enough to support two and three semester sequences in writing and others too small to provide more than a small remedial fix-it station, manned (usually “womanned,” in fact) by one overworked paraprofessional; and then there are the predilections and resources of individual teachers or program administrators which lead to the choice of one path to competence rather than another, sometimes even tempting the choosers to believe they have stumbled upon not simply *a* way but *the* way. Beyond this, there are within the profession many unsettled and unsettling questions about the nature of competence in writing and the means to achieve it, about the needs of adult learners and the prospects of meeting these needs through *any* of the methods that have been tried so far.

Our purpose in inviting teachers to submit course descriptions for this issue was two-fold: first, we wanted to document the diversity of outlook and design that seems to us to characterize basic writing teaching at this time; and second, we hoped to find individual accounts of courses that would of themselves be useful to all teachers, if only to remind them that there are many ways to climb Mt. Fuji. From among the many articles that were sent in, we have therefore chosen six which propose quite different paths to competence in basic writing.

We cannot claim that these are newly-broken paths. The reader will recognize in most of them familiar strategies and emphases. Indeed, what begins to appear to be the major “innovative” task in basic writing is to determine (1) what of the available knowledge about the teaching of writing can be put to use in basic writing and (2) how that knowledge

and the methods it has generated can be adapted to the needs of basic writing students. For the two most important facts about these students is that they are adults and they are in a hurry to master what their more fortunate peers mastered over many years of direct and indirect instruction. Being adults, these students can take conceptual short-cuts that younger learners are not ready to take. What children might learn through drill and long exposure to special forms or styles, basic writing students can approach through analysis and self-guided practice. And being in a hurry, these students require that their teachers select judiciously from among the many sub-skills of writing those that will enable their students to take the next step in whatever institutional framework they happen to be studying.

The differences we observe between basic writing courses and traditional composition courses and between one basic writing course and another grow largely out of teachers' responses to these facts of adulthood and limited classtime. Thus, while research has taught us much, for example, about the English spelling system and practitioners have begun to put that knowledge to use with young learners, we have yet to determine how best to adapt what is known about spelling to the needs of adult bad spellers, whose habits as speakers and writers are more deeply rooted, whose learning often involves *un*learning, and whose goals must be realistically related to their situations (with greater emphasis, perhaps, upon proofreading and dictionary skills than upon habitual, drilled correctness, or upon reducing spelling errors rather than being free of them).

Each of the authors of the course descriptions that follow is in a sense proposing a hypothesis about what comes first for the basic writing student and is then suggesting a sequence and method for reaching this first station of competence. Each of the authors would probably agree on what a student must be able finally to do as a college writer, but s/he has chosen a different place to begin or a different method of proceeding from one point to the next. As her title suggests, Jeanne Desy proposes that the first competence, to which all others are subordinate and from which they are likely, in fact, to flow, is the ability to reason soundly. Her path therefore takes us into the territory of logic and rhetoric. To Dianna S. Campbell and Terry Ryan Meier, the central difficulties of their students with written English appear to grow out of their limited understanding of language—its varieties, functions, and distinctive grammatical features. Theirs is thus a course about language, an attempt to deal with error in a way that challenges students to think about more than error.

Marie Ponsot tells us of an intensive summer program that moves from the fable to the academic essay through a "paradise" of summer time and a livelier collegial atmosphere than the regular academic season generally allows. Helen Mills describes a system of instruction involving twenty-nine study units that are taught according to the principles of mastery learning. For her, the most effective "course" in writing is not a course but a sequence of lessons with highly defined, testable objectives that can be offered in a variety of combinations and according to different timetables. To Ann Petrie, the key skill for the beginning writer is the skill of thinking in consciously analytical ways, a skill that in her judgment requires students to have access to their feelings as well as their thoughts. She proposes a way of teaching the five-paragraph academic essay that develops analytical skills without cutting students off from the experiences that give rise to thoughts. Finally, Paul Pierog would have us attend more to interest and vitality in student writing. He concentrates on the responsibility of the writer to recreate that which was unique in the experience he is writing about, and he strives, through dramatization, coaching, and group writing and editing to teach the skill of imagining what it is like to be a reader.

Such diversity of purpose and method has many uses. It reminds us of what we are not doing and urges us to consider more carefully why we do what we do. It reveals to us how variously we perceive the difficulties of students and how differently, therefore, we define "basic." It suggests, too, that while the remedial situation dictates that we reduce the universe of writing to "basic" subskills, the skill of writing seems to defy such reduction, impressing us again and again with its subtle involvement of various faculties and skills, some of which we as individual teachers decide to recognize and others to ignore, or to take note of "later."

Such observations, rather than urging us toward a uniform system of teaching basic writing, should encourage us to explore further this many-mansioned skill we are learning to teach, and to view the variety we find wherever skilled and imaginative teachers are at work as a resource rather than a flaw.

The third issue of the *Journal* is to be entitled *Uses of Grammar*, and again we invite your contributions. We will be looking for articles that describe the effects teachers expect from grammatical instruction, that devote some time to the hypotheses that undergird particular uses of grammar, and that provide solid rationales for the sequences, strategies, and materials used.

MINA P. SHAUGHNESSY



## REASONED WRITING FOR BASIC STUDENTS: A COURSE DESIGN

In his classic essay “Examsmanship and the Liberal Arts: a Study in Educational Epistemology,”<sup>1</sup> William G. Perry, Jr. discusses the problem of the theory of knowledge in terms of grading “bull” and what he names “cow.” The incident that impelled him to write is interesting.

Briefly, one Mr. Metzger (a pseudonym for a Harvard student, class of ’47) rocketed to celebrity/notoriety after impulsively and for no apparent reason taking an exam under the name Smith in a social science course for which he was not registered and which he had never attended. Cheerfully, I gather, he wrote an essay discussing a book he had never read.

The scandal resulted when, because a real Smith was absent, Metzger’s essay was graded and returned—with an A–. It is relevant to the resultant controversy that a conscientious friend of Metzger who *had* taken the course received a C+.

Perry rose to the defense of the hapless section leader responsible by examining what he saw as the fundamental purpose of the university: that it “should teach students how to think; not only in their own fields but in fields outside their own. . . . Here then, good bull [such as Metzger had written] appears not as ignorance at all but as an aspect of knowledge.” Bull, by Perry’s definition, is the “discourse upon the contexts, frames of reference and points of observation which would determine the origin, nature, and meaning of data if one had any.” It is, he theorized, better than cow: “data [listed] without awareness of, or comment upon, the contexts,

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<sup>1</sup>From *Examining in Harvard College: A Collection of Essays by Members of the Harvard Faculty* (n.d.), rpt. in Arthur M. Eastman, ed., *The Norton Reader, Revised* (New York: Norton, 1969), pp. 328-38.

frames of reference, or points of observation which determine the origin, nature, and meaning of the data." Simplistically, cow is a collection of facts; bull is a collection of generalizations; the ideal essay marries the two.

Perry completed his defense by pointing out that while we should grade cow more toughly than we in fact do (always a C+, he noted) we should respect good bull more than we do, because, although it does not represent command of facts, and is therefore incomplete, it does show *command of the ways of thinking we value*.

The significance of Perry's essay for us is that it asserts the fundamental purpose of the university. This ideal, that the student learn to set knowledge into its framework, to evaluate and rearrange data, is in my opinion as fundamental to the vocational school and the open-admissions state university today as it was to Harvard in 1945. I think most of us assume it as our fundamental purpose. While many courses, and writing is no exception, necessarily teach facts, most of us deplore the accumulation of simple data without sensibility and its resultant regurgitation on the test. And, beyond question, students cannot learn to write that way. In fact, the single most serious impediment to student writing is the lack of command of the modes of thinking.

The Basic Writing Course that is a data course commits all those errors that frighten the student and may well leave him writing a more-or-less grammatical but meaningless prose. Language seen or performed only as language is (when it's not poetry) a meaningless bore. Not only does it bore the student, it bores the reader. Later, the details of grammar once thought so important recede into the distance as the student confronts his paper on comparative political ideologies, or his analysis of lab methodology, somewhere far from the bright white space of the writing class; all that English cow does him no good now, because he is no longer expected just to write; he is expected to think. God help him.\*

This fact—that students need to be taught to think—is generally ignored. Students are almost never required to take courses in logic; if they elect to, they will minuet through the elegant patterns of symbolic logic for most of the quarter, having spent only a week or two on the informal fallacies and no time at all on decision-making. It has been possible, and indeed likely, at every school

\*Although I am an active feminist, I use "he" rather than "s/he" in formal writing such as this; occasionally style seems as important as politics.

where I have taught (four, in all) for a student to graduate with only the most casual and accidental exposure to the very modes of reasoning the schools wanted the students to master. A little discussion of analogy in English Lit class (while reading Donne), some induction in Sociology, some deduction in Physics, and so on. And yet there can be no serious education, no thorough vocational training, without careful training in the methods of thought.

Given that students *need* to know how to think, that it is the University's purpose to teach them (if only among other things), that they cannot write if they cannot think, and that they are not usually taught to think, two important questions arise.

The first is, Can reasoning be taught to students who are academically and intellectually below average, either in preparation or ability? My experience is that it can. In fact, students already use—there is no way they cannot—the modes of reasoning. Induction: "She stood me up. Women can't be trusted." Deduction: "The Constitution gives us the right to bear arms. Nobody's taking my gun away." Analogy: "Rome fell when they got free love." Causal reasoning: "Why didn't my boyfriend call last night?" They make decisions, or fail to. So the problem isn't that students don't reason or can't; the problem is that most have not been taught to reason *correctly*. So much for that. Rephrasing the question, then, Can these students be taught to reason correctly? Yes. Reasoning, like many another skill, demands first command of a body of concepts and rules, then skills-practice, then practice at synthesis, or using the knowledge to solve new problems. The relative complexity of the concepts will lose the very dullest student—and so will other courses whose substances are equally complex. In all, the process of learning to reason is, however similar to that of learning first conceptually about coherence, and finally, through practice, how to write coherently.

The second important question is, Is it the province of the writing class to teach reason? After all, our given purpose is to teach writing; it is the Philosophy Department (where it exists) that purposes to teach thinking.

The answer, for starters, is that it shouldn't be that way. But before I get to that, let me discuss what writing is.

My thesis is that writing *is* thinking, made plain and given over to someone else for consideration (i.e., communicated). This idea is, I believe, the unrevealed heart of the many texts which currently emphasize purposefulness and pre-writing in the essay. Of

these, James McCrimmon's *Writing With a Purpose* is a well-known example. The hope of such books is that by making the student think before he writes we can loosen his firm grip on the cow. The underlying assumption is that thought is the basis of writing. *Is* writing.

We *do* recognize this in Basic Writing. More and more textbooks include reasoning. But they do so as if logic were a decal to be hauled out at appropriate moments and pasted on a paper: something we might get to (and don't) at the end of the quarter. Most often, students learn from their texts that grammar, convention, and rhetorical forms are the heart of writing, and that logic is somehow applied to these. But where is the paper? The paper is not *in* the comparison/contrast or the prepositional phrase or the transitional marker. The paper, I submit, is in the reasoning process.

If students are to learn to make thought plain on paper, they must be taught to do so in a writing class. A logic class, even one which included writing, would be inadequate, because it would almost certainly consider the line of thought as a line of thought alone, mathematical. But writing is *communicated* reasoning. For the writer, a hundred considerations nibble the heels of the argument. Does it convince? Does the tone support the statements? Are errors in syntax, diction, and convention interfering with the reader's understanding? In fact, all those rules and warnings which occupy writing handbooks become vital. If this begins to sound like any old writing class, repeat: all those things are secondary. The reasoning process itself *is* the paper.

I understand well that my view is not typical. When I began to develop a writing course based on reason, I found myself bringing in materials considered peripheral: semantics, logic. I have wrestled since with the problem of emphasis I see in textbooks, and mentioned above. Perhaps the cause of the problem is the division of disciplines we have inherited, and to which some of us ascribe with reluctance. We have seen this demarcation crossed in many places in the last decade: women's literature blends into sociology and history; history discusses the ethics of Zionism. That we should see writing as distinct from thinking, rather than as one of the activities to which thinking gives rise, is no surprise to the historian. That we should now consider a new focus is equally predictable—and necessary.

I consider the two major objectives of my course in Reasoned Writing to be these: that the student (1) learn to think, and (2) learn to communicate his thought effectively in writing.<sup>2</sup> Since he is not taught elsewhere to think, I begin at the beginning; otherwise I would be tooling the upholstery with no chassis in sight—and no destination, anyway.

From these major objectives grow the following specific objectives. They concentrate on the reasoning process, and, as I hope to show, allow room to work in the principles of effective writing. The objectives are, that each student learn to:

1. know the available sources of knowledge (in a general sense, initially);
2. understand and accept the epistemology of the university and the modern world;
3. distinguish non-statements from statements;
4. perceive the meaning of a statement;
5. perceive the meaning of an essay;
6. perceive the modes of reasoning he already uses;
7. understand the correct use of those modes;
8. collect data;
9. classify data;
10. arrive at generalizations;
11. analyze the correctness of arguments (his own and others'); 12. construct a correct argument;
13. write that argument effectively.

Here I'd like to pause and point out the close relationship of these objectives to the traditional subject matter of the writing course and to the student's needs. Objectives four and five involve the student in paraphrase and summary, and prepare him for reading texts and other nonfiction. Objectives eight and nine stress the gathering of materials in the library. Objective ten presents the Aristotelian systematic thought that readies the student for learning of every kind (and is often taught as "development through classification," or "whole-to-parts development"). Objective eleven prepares him for the critical analysis, a frequently assigned college paper and a skill needed in many jobs, from provost to mechanic. In terms of the service aspect of a writing class, objectives eight through thirteen are especially important; in a survey of the faculty at my own school, I found that *every* paper assigned to students demands the ability to use at least one of the skills these objectives aim to teach.

<sup>2</sup>It may be noteworthy that I do not consider among my objectives the raising of the student's perception or feelings, as advocated by, for instance, Ken Macrorie in *Uptaught* (New York: Hayden, 1970). My most difficult students are those who have taken creative writing courses which distorted free writing theory and asked of them only an outpouring; they are hostile to thinking. How are they ever going to write a department progress report or a bill of lading?



Now I want to discuss these objectives individually and indicate some methods I use to reach them.<sup>3</sup>

Objectives one and two are introduced on the first or second day of class. As I explain, many consider intuition, revelation, authority, and tradition to be valid sources of knowledge. Because the fad among students for Castenada, and the resultant (or causal?) high valuation of the mystical experience is by no means dead, at least not here in the Midwest, I tell the class how in my own life I value revealed and intuitive knowledge (I practice hathayoga, for instance). I speak, too, and not for the last time, of the need to consider audience. My friends, I say, respect my intuitions (or pretend to); the Registrar respects data. I discuss authority and the religious tradition, and point out that if a reader does not believe in the Bible or the Constitution as an ultimate source of Truth, every argument that rests on these documents is without impact. This lecture follows a simple projected transparency which lists:

- intuition

- revelation

- authority

- tradition

- reason

  - based on first-hand experience

  - based on second-hand experience (books, etc.)

Most of my students learn these concepts in one class hour. As important as their understanding of the ideas is the fact that they are reassured that I am not defining or dispensing wisdom for them; I am only telling them what is valued in the university and the real [sic] world in this century: reason. Until I learned to stress this last concept, I encountered time and again long-active hostilities that seriously impeded the class's learning. (Incidentally, I find it infinitely helpful to ask that questions and comments be withheld until I have finished this particular lecture.)

Objective three. We discuss briefly the importance of verbal rituals and other forms of communication that are not statements, and, because reason rests on statements, I distinguish the statement from the non-statement. I rely heavily on S. I. Hayakawa's definitions here,<sup>4</sup> showing the varieties of non-statement and explaining

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix I for a brief course outline.

<sup>4</sup>Found in *Language in Thought and Action* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), especially chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7.

that some sentences that don't look like statements really are. ("How long are we going to put up with this, anyway?") I tell the students that the only thing I want them to learn on this day is what a statement is and that classifying non-statements is largely irrelevant to our purpose; however, students are always interested in rituals and non-statements, and many end up learning about them anyway and using this knowledge later in critical analyses, and that can't hurt.

With objectives four and five—perceiving meaning—I begin skills practice with analysis of statements and readings, and begin summary assignments. The first such summary is a section from "Work" by Bertrand Russell (excellent, because Russell organizes transparently and is a model of careful reasoning. He is also interesting—even on work). The final summary will be longer, involving more difficult concepts, and requiring more careful reading from the student.<sup>5</sup>

To begin this unit, which is also an introduction to the thesis sentence, I show the class how to put a complex statement into simple and accurate language, and give the class exercises to do overnight. On the following day the students volunteer (yes!) to write their best reworded statements on the board, and we analyze them. Next I present standards for good summary<sup>6</sup> and explain what organization the students can expect to find in the first article they summarize (topic sentence first, supporting data, conclusion—you know). This takes a day or two of lecture and discussion. I like to use controversial readings for this discussion, because such readings inspire the students to look for evidence. John Aldridge's paperback, *In the Country of the Young*<sup>7</sup>, is good, but difficult; students need to hear a paragraph aloud before they can analyze it.

The summary unit occupies several weeks of out-of-class work, as students turn in progressively more difficult assignments, get

<sup>5</sup>The only text I am familiar with that includes a good selection of articles for summary, presented in order of difficulty, is Mary Lou Conlin's *Concepts of Communication: Writing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). This book, which includes programmed grammar and spelling exercises, is the text I currently use to supplement my own material.

<sup>6</sup>*Concepts of Communication: Writing* includes a useful list of standards, called summary tasks, on pp. 307-8, to which I have added for my own classes "proportional use of quotation." The standards are numbered to simplify grading; one can simply write 42 in the margin to tell the student that major points are not given in sequence and should be.

<sup>7</sup>New York: Harper, 1971, Perennial Library Edition (still in print).

them back, sometimes revise, and sometimes go on. The first summaries are almost all F's (demonstrating how much students need to be taught this skill), but the students are told (*after* they receive the papers back) that, while the mark has been noted, it will not be counted in the final grade. (I find it invaluable to keep an individual progress sheet for each student, on which I note the assignment, the date, and the most significant errors and virtues of the paper, as well as the grade and any revision requested. This is much more accurate than a simple grade in following students' progress.) After an average of four summaries, a student perceives the meaning of individual statements and the organization of a paragraph and of an essay. He can choose apt quotes and copy them accurately. He knows exactly what plagiarism is. He can now write a good answer on an essay exam or a good book report (or whatever fancy name that antique, ubiquitous assignment is called by), and he can read well when he chooses to—not quickly, but well, which is far more important. My evaluations indicate that students, in retrospect, love this unit for what it has given them; in prospect, they hate it.

Objectives six and seven are fun. Class work on these objectives—perceiving the modes of reasoning and understanding their correct use—takes place while out-of-class work consists primarily of summary-writing.

I first present mimeographed examples of everyday statements which rest on reasoning. Then students give their own examples. "My roommate throws his socks on the floor; he's a slob; I should change roommates." ("No you shouldn't," someone cuts in, and if I'm not careful, we're off.) The next lecture explains classification and is based on the assumption that the student is already perceiving classification in the essays he is summarizing, and has himself classified objects and activities while working on his car, washing the dishes, stereotyping people, etc. The following day I hand out a list of things and activities which can be classified, and we discuss their choices from my list. The chalk boards become covered with ways to classify cars, cats, brands of cigarettes. Students are next assigned overnight a classification of their own (and thus introduced to the most elementary principle of the topic outline), primarily as a way for me to check that they do understand how to classify according to a consistent principle.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>A particularly interesting discussion of classification is contained in Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York: Bantam, 1974), pp. 69-72 and passim. See also Hayakawa, chapter 12.

Having graded these outlines overnight, I assign the first essay, a paragraph based on the approved outline. These writings are usually a pleasant surprise in terms of their clear organization; moreover, adequate development often happens, as it were, because the student has learned through summary how many supporting data are usually needed for a major point.

The remaining modes of informal reasoning are treated in like manner. I use the following order: causal analysis, induction, deduction,<sup>9</sup> analogy,<sup>10</sup> and decision-making,<sup>11</sup> because my experience is that this is the order of difficulty. (This classification of the modes of informal reasoning is finally my own with reference to my undergraduate minor in Philosophy and to a number of texts from assorted disciplines.) As students learn the rules for each method, they first summarize an article (the shorter, the better, for all concerned) which uses that mode, then write a paragraph (later, a paper) using that mode. (A paragraph is defined in my classes as a unit of writing beginning with a topic sentence, containing between 100 and 200 words, and ending with a restatement. I note frequently and offhandedly that, while newspapers do not, quality magazines and textbooks *do* use this sort of paragraph.)

Many textbooks now include all these modes of reasoning, except decision-making, which exclusion is a mystery to me. Most seem to be written for the student with an SAT of 600, and are virtually useless in the Basic Writing class. Not only that, many are inaccurate. For example, in treating effect-to-cause reasoning, most leave out the essential starting point: define the problem clearly. Other books wrongly include causal fallacies under inductive fallacies; most overemphasize deduction and explain its fallacies in terms ranging from obscure to bizarre. I deal almost exclusively from my own mimeographed material. For others who wish to try this

<sup>9</sup>Deduction is of dubious value; induction is by far a more common mode. Deduction is also the most difficult to teach the Basic Writing student. If you do wish to teach it, the system which uses circles to demonstrate validity [presented, for instance, in William F. Smith and Raymond D. Liedlich, *From Thought to Theme*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1974), pp. 137-9] is easier on both student and teacher than the formulaic system.

<sup>10</sup>It is appropriate, when teaching analogy, to teach the forms for comparison/contrast. I *never* ask students to write a paper depending on a central analogy; a good analogy is a rare inspiration. I ask for "a paper that makes significant use of analogy or contrast in developing its thesis."

<sup>11</sup>Because decision-making is not included in any freshman reader or handbook I have examined, I have included my own procedure as Appendix II to this article.

approach and, like me, cannot find The Text, I suggest the following sequence of mimeographed materials:

- examples of everyday use of the mode

- explanation of the appropriate use of the mode

- explanation of the fallacious use of the mode

- examples of fallacies (mixed with correct usages) for overnight skills practice and class discussion

This sequence is preceded by a summary of an article using the mode correctly (see Appendix I) and followed by the assignment that the student write a paragraph or paper using the mode to a significant degree.

As we enter objectives eight through thirteen, we work simultaneously on decision-making (see Appendix II) and on the techniques of research, since informed decisions rest on adequate data. My handouts list the library tools I expect the students to use (see Appendix III), and I give a three-day slide presentation showing these tools, their indexes, and so forth, followed immediately by a test. I spend about twenty minutes explaining the techniques of interview, since I request that each student use an interview in the research paper. (Briefly, I suggest beginning by checking the correct spelling of the expert's name, interviewing, if possible, on the telephone, and asking three or four specific questions which cannot be answered simply Yes or No. Students need reassurance that experts are delighted to be asked for their opinions; I often suggest other faculty members.) Wise from experience, I forbid the students to make any surveys; we deal with survey only in terms of analyzing the correctness of method in surveys gathered during research. (To administer a meaningful survey is expensive and time-consuming; the techniques are difficult to teach and not, I think, as important as other research techniques. Students whom I have allowed to undertake surveys in the past have bogged down in them.)

An important assignment before students enter the actual research paper is the factual development paragraph. I give out a sheet with topic sentences to choose from. (Easy: "Space research has led to useful new techniques in medicine." Hard: "Gun control is a controversial issue."<sup>12</sup>) Students are instructed to research in an

<sup>12</sup>A topic is difficult according to how likely it is to arouse in the student emotions which interfere with his perception of fact. This varies, of course, with the student. Students learn something of value from having to revise this assignment when it is their own prejudice that has distorted their data-gathering.



encyclopedia, almanac, or yearbook, and to write a paragraph, using their data and documenting the source in-text, the form for which I teach at this point. In a typical class, about half the students get off the topic and end up proving something else altogether; they are told either to change the topic sentence to fit, or to find new information, depending entirely on my assessment of the individual student's needs and abilities. Most learn at last, by doing this assignment, the exact difference between bull and cow.

I have already indicated some methods for teaching decision-making (in Appendix II). In teaching the research paper, I discuss, among other things, typical professorial standards, definition of purpose and audience, and evaluation of a source's accuracy, relevance, bias, and knowledgeability. I usually return to a previously summarized article and lead the class to discuss it now with these new concepts in mind.

The paper itself I take through a sequence of steps worth giving here, I think, because of the excellent results it produces: (1) narrowed topic; (2) central question and research plan;<sup>13</sup> (3) preliminary bibliography;<sup>14</sup> (4) labeled notes and outline; (5) first draft;<sup>15</sup> (6) final draft with footnote and bibliography pages added. I check every step, assigning grades, and do not permit steps to be done out of sequence or more than one at a time. With each step assigned, I give a mimeographed sheet with detailed instructions and an explanation of grading standards for that assignment. I have found that giving these standards results in superior work. It also makes it possible for my student assistant to grade the work according to my standards.

I find it crucial to confer with each student on his central question and research plan, and to indicate to him the kind of work his topic will demand. At this point most topics get narrowed; many are simplified for the academically handicapped student, or

<sup>13</sup>A research plan is a paragraph detailing in order the indexes and reference works the student plans to consult and the headings he plans to look under. ("Nothing is ever under the most logical heading.")

<sup>14</sup>I assign students to gather approximately four times as many sources as they intend to use. I check these cards and note for the student those that are out-dated or obviously biased, as well as those that will be productive starting-points.

<sup>15</sup>I distinguish between a rough draft and a first draft, which must be legible and generally as good as the student can make it. Not every student will be required to revise this draft; all are required, however, to turn in a final title page, first page, footnote page, and bibliography, so that all learn the correct forms.

changed for the student who has tried to choose a subject to please me and is himself really uninterested in the topic.

In this paper, which is the culmination of the course, and is usually worth a total (counting all steps) of forty percent of the grade, the student will at last consider a contemporary, controversial issue,<sup>16</sup> analyze arguments on both sides, using all the modes of reasoning he is presumed to have learned, and construct a hierarchy of values with which to reach a decision. The student evaluation of this unit I cherish goes as follows: "I now know how to write a paper two ways, the night before, or the right way. If that's what this course was all about, fine. If not, I don't now what the hell to say." [sic.]

Motivation: my students want to learn how to write research papers, because here at Capital most upperclassmen do so every semester. That isn't true everywhere. But if it were not true here, and if I were not required to teach the research paper, I would still do so, because I believe that education is in part knowing how to find out. Moreover, my own memory is that those issues I know and care most about are the issues I wrote papers on. And, most importantly, I believe in the moral and intellectual virtue of having made at least once an intelligent, informed decision. My students know I believe these things, and many seem to respect these beliefs, although few, at 18, understand them.

Of course, I work myself (and them) to death. I gather my rewards, not financial.

Where in all this is syntax, punctuation, consistent point of view . . . where is "writing"? It is sandwiched in between assignments, given ten minutes here and there at the beginning of class. On blank days and while something is waiting to be graded, I present the good old virtues of the paragraph: unity, completeness, order, and coherence. (If nothing else, my students learn these, since I frequently project a highly artistic home-made transparency which lists them.)

I find time to deal with coherence, for example, on the day I

<sup>16</sup>The issue is contemporary (generally, of concern within the past ten years) because I want the students to use the periodical indexes, and controversial because students do more-or-less know how to write mere reports; it is decision-making that I want them to practice in this assignment.

return the first summary, since even the best of those summaries usually lack transitions altogether (except for the inevitable, "In conclusion"). I find time to deal with sentence formation, using the simple system in which sentences have slots for subject, verb, modifier, complement, and connector.<sup>17</sup> Students approach this system with obvious relief, and together we enthusiastically reject gerunds.

My belief is that any writing teacher who cares enough to read this journal knows how to work with grammar and convention, and can fit these skills into a course design where they are appropriate.

With some students, I assign and go over individual exercises on, perhaps, vague pronoun reference. About fifteen percent of my students I send to the writing clinic, where they are tutored weekly in the specific deficiencies I have diagnosed in their writing.

But frankly, the rationale and sterling virtue of the Reasoned Writing approach is that by imitation and analysis students simply begin to write clear sentences that say what they mean; syntax clears itself up; modifiers and commas hobble to their appropriate places.

The method of Reasoned Writing has worked me almost beyond my capacity—and has worked *for* me beyond my expectations. I once taught grammar and paragraph form. It didn't work. My experience, having taught this course over the years to some twenty sections of 25 students each (while nationwide SATs fell), is that students who don't learn to write a decent, readable paper through this method are the ones who would have learned less through my old, more conventional method. Statistic: about ten percent of my students either don't work much or don't learn fast enough; I ask them to withdraw (or, sadly, they fail) and repeat the course. But then, we have only one 14-week semester at my school in which to do all this, about 50 class hours.

Sometimes, usually around Thanksgiving, I feel myself burning out, about to transform, like Dorian Gray. There is no doubt in my mind that this is the most demanding way to teach writing. It can only be done with patience, aspirin, and the occasional re-

<sup>17</sup>See Marie L. Waddell, Robert M. Esch, and Roberta P. Walker, *The Art of Styling Sentences: 20 Patterns to Success* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1972).

reading of Kenneth Koch's "Permanently,"<sup>18</sup> wherein Nouns and Conjunctions and language itself are seen in their ultimate absurdity, and bull and cow alike become ridiculous.

But then class begins again and ends again—and the whole thing works, again.

## APPENDIX I

### COURSE OUTLINE

(Based on a four-hour class week; includes in- and out-of-class work)

Week 1: basic *epistemology*, distinction of statements from non-statements; analysis of statements; skills practice.

Week 2: introduction to *summary* standards; discussion of readings; summary of an article based on classification; overview of the modes of reasoning the student presently uses.

Week 3: *classification*: lecture, discussion, outline, paragraph; summary of an article based on effect-to-cause reasoning.

Week 4: *causal analysis*: lecture, discussion, skills practice, analysis of reading, paragraph demonstrating use; summary of an article based on induction.

Weeks 5 & 6: *induction*: lectures; skills practice and discussion of fallacies; analysis of readings; paragraph demonstrating use [based on personal experience]; summary of an article based on deductive reasoning.

Week 7: *deduction*: same procedure as week 4; summary of an article based on analogy.

Week 8: *analogy*: same procedure as weeks 4 and 7; see footnote<sup>10</sup> for suggestions regarding the theme assignment; summary of an article which uses a decision-making procedure.

Week 9: *decision-making* and factual development. See Appendix II for discussion of presentation.

Weeks 10-14: data gathering; the research paper; synthesizing the modes of reasoning; conferences. See text and Appendix III for discussion of procedures used in the research paper.

Final exam: (three hours)

I. Summarize a 1000-word article in 200 words or less (article given at that time, of course).

<sup>18</sup>For your pleasure, I will note that "Permanently" appears in Koch's *Thank You and Other Poems* (Grove Press, 1962), which is still in print.

- II. Write a theme of adequate length (to be decided by the student) explaining any concept of importance and demonstrating its truth and importance.

NOTE:

Our policy in freshman composition classes at Capital, announced on the first day of class, is that a student who cannot write a final in-class theme which meets the NCTE standards for a C must be failed *if* another member of the department agrees that the paper is inadequate and that the student would profit by repeating the course. We usually urge students whose skills remain dubious to withdraw the last week of class in order to avoid failure.

## APPENDIX II

### DECISION-MAKING

I see decision-making as properly following these steps:

- (1) define the problem clearly
- (2) list all possible alternatives
- (3) under each alternative, list positive and negative aspects
- (4) apply stated values to the choice

After explaining these concepts, I begin with an example relevant to the students' daily lives, using an overhead projector to list their contributions. For instance:

- (1) Problem—"My parents and I fight all the time about when I come in at night." The problem redefined more clearly: "I am distressed because. . ."

- (2) and (3) Alternatives, positive and negative aspects—

- (a) Stop being distressed: can't do it, haven't tried. . .
- (b) Come in when they want me to: would still feel distressed, might be better off in health, on the job. . .
- (c) Move out: can't afford to, want to, don't want to, would still be distressed. . .
- (d) Discuss with them my distress: afraid to, have tried. . .
- (e) Get someone's expert advice: counseling center, Aunt Ethel. . .

etc.

- (4) Values—family peace, personal independence, financial security, etc. [We spend only ten minutes trying to arrange these in a hierarchy, and conclude that values are personal.]



The next day I give a problem amenable to the same procedure, but academic in nature, and we go through it again. Here one needs to choose a problem the students will know something about through other courses. For instance, "Wealth is not distributed equally in America" is good where I teach, because it is a national problem discussed in the required sociology class.

In teaching decision-making, I stress the usefulness of going to informed sources for data and for advice; I also discuss the ways in which values are shared but finally personal.

## APPENDIX III

### LIBRARY RESOURCES

One requirement for the research paper I assign is the extensive use of library resources. For the Basic Writing student these include:

*The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*

*The Wall Street Journal Index*

*Editorial Research Reports*

*Editorials on File/Facts on File*

*Statistical Abstract of the United States*

the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or the *Americana* (no other)

the pamphlet file

the card catalog

My assignment sheet includes the following instructions:

"It is permissible to use books, but more than half your references should come from periodicals, reference books, and pamphlets. . . . You *must* be able to produce a source upon request. If you are in doubt about the accessibility of a source, make a copy, because no excuses are acceptable. . . . An interview with someone competent on your subject is recommended. . . . Be sure that *The Reader's Guide* is not the only index you use. . . ."

True, some of the reference works listed above are difficult for the student to learn to use. For this reason, I schedule two mornings in the library, and often spend an hour with one student, going over the indexes and repeating the material in the slide lecture. But all these works are general in nature and valuable, and together give the student adequate data for a paper on any contemporary problem.

For more advanced students, I suggest *The New York Times Index* and *The Index to Social Sciences/Humanities*.

DIANNA S. CAMPBELL  
AND TERRY RYAN MEIER

## A DESIGN FOR A DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING COURSE FOR ACADEMICALLY UNDERPREPARED BLACK STUDENTS

While developing the original design for a developmental composition course at Marquette University, we studied approximately 150 writing samples produced by academically underprepared Black students. Most students were freshmen who had recently graduated from inner-city Milwaukee high schools and, although we found a tremendously wide range in linguistic sophistication among those sampled, slightly over half fell into a fairly homogeneous middle group. The writing of this group was, in general, typified by the following excerpt from a freshman's theme. She had been assigned to analyze Art Buchwald's diction in an article in which he satirized Lester Maddox's stated position on prison reform:

This paper is about a statement Mr. Maddox makes. He said, we need better prisoners in our prison to have a better prison. How Mr. Buchwald disagree with him, but he writes an essay and pretends to agree with Mr. Maddox statement only to make him look worst then he really is. How in Mr. Buchwald essay, he use diction. The way in which he uses word and the way he turn phrases around or the way he say words meaning the oppose to what he really try to say.

An analysis of this sample and others like it forced us to consider whether much of the professional discussion of the needs of dialect-speaking students, and the curricula generated from such discussion, have not been founded upon oversimplified expectations and distorted assessments of their linguistic capabilities. In planning a curriculum to meet her needs, for instance, should this student be described as a "dialect speaker"? Certainly there are several features, including forma-

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tion of plural nouns, subject-verb agreement, and indication of possession, that suggest that she is a speaker of Black dialect. But will she be a competent writer, will she be able to survive in the college classroom if she is treated primarily as a dialect speaker and taught to use the inflections of the dominant dialect, Edited American English, where required? Surely most of us would agree that the most notable feature of this student's writing is her obvious inability to make language work for her. Although her difficulty in using language as a vehicle makes it impossible to fully assess the extent of her comprehension, it does seem that she has at least begun to grasp a complex assignment and that, however incoherent her expression, she does have some inkling of what Buchwald was up to. But the sentence fragments, anxious repetitiveness, and vague circularity at the end of her introduction all indicate that she cannot translate her logic into language and, most important, that dialect differences are the least of her worries.

This *relative* insignificance of dialect variances was a common feature in the writing of most students sampled. Furthermore, we found the overgeneralization of EAE patterns evident in her fusion of past and present tense "rules" ("Maddox *mades*") to be prevalent. Random code-switching was also a recurrent factor in the majority of samples. (In the excerpt above, note the EAE subject-verb agreement and BD plural noun formation in "he uses word," but the BD subject-verb agreement and EAE plural noun formation in "he turn phrases," which occurs later in the same sentence.)

From these observations we concluded that the best possible writing course would carefully avoid two major oversimplifications: 1) that our students are conscious, consistent, and fluent writers of Black dialect, and 2) that any attempt to teach them to become bidialectical could succeed without being related to the larger question of how language itself functions. The samples provided ample evidence that most of the students who would benefit from a developmental, basic writing course were best characterized as inexperienced and unpracticed writers, a fact that probably has less to do with considerations of dialect than with the realities of understaffed, overcrowded urban schools and the tendencies of an increasingly visual, media-oriented society. Consequently, the assumption that has come to underly our course is that before our students can be expected to manipulate the inflectional and syntactical patterns of two dialects, they must have an awareness of the potential of language to be controlled and used and a certain degree of conscious knowledge about the structural components of sentences and how they function. The academic,

social, and political imperative to learn the dominant dialect is simply not the only or even primary challenge most of our students face. A course that would adequately serve their complex and diverse needs would have to look beyond dialect differences without losing sight of them.

By analyzing the writing samples we had collected, it was not difficult to determine what we would teach in the course; among our top priorities were constructing and punctuating sound English sentences, using simple and functional methods of coordination and subordination, adding the inflections of the dominant dialect, and avoiding usage errors, many of them involving the interchanging of homonyms (for example, their-there-they're, your-you're, past-passed, know-no). The problem that soon reared its ugly head was how to organize all of these diverse priorities into a course that would make sense to students and would facilitate the quickest and easiest possible improvement in their writing. Several questions had to be answered. Should dialect differences be taught in special, distinct sections throughout the course? Or should they be taught at the end of the course, after students would have acquired a certain degree of skill in structuring sentences? What would happen, for instance, if students learned the different "rules" governing the systems of subject-verb agreement in the two dialects, but could not consistently identify subjects? How could students be asked to insert appropriate EAE forms of the verb "to be" into sentences in which it is implied but not stated (the BD "zero copula") if they could not determine the point that separates the subject and predicate of a given sentence? If our ultimate objective was the sound, fluent composition of sentences, at what point should students be taught the differences between EAE and BD plural noun formation, since nouns can appear in various structural slots? When should they be taught EAE methods of indicating that a noun is possessive?

Out of chaos eventually came a measure of order. We decided to develop a course which would reacquaint or, in many cases, introduce students to the general principles of sentence structure, and then within that framework, handle inflectional and syntactical differences between Edited American English and Black dialect wherever necessary. Exercises on dialect differences and usage problems would not be relegated to appendices or special sections; they would be integrated into the course wherever they would make the most sense to the students.

Our first step was to write an introductory statement that would

orient students to the purpose and methods of the course and would excite them, or at least make them comfortable, with the prospect of becoming bidialectical. This statement discusses the linguistic equality and academic, social, and political inequality of various dialects at length. Edited American English is presented as the dominant dialect of this society, but even more emphasis is placed on its status as primarily a *written* language and, as such, the idiom of academic discourse. The introduction also stresses the value of being able to use different dialects in different contexts, particularly in terms of the necessity of all good writers to consciously identify their voice, audience, and purpose. What is appropriate or what "works" in one situation may not work in another; the college classroom is, of course, a "context," a specifically defined environment with its own set of expectations, one of which is the proficient use of EAE.

We decided to use the term "Edited American English" rather than "Standard English" or any other label because of the implications of the word "edited." Students are reminded that writing is a formal process, that it is not as spontaneous as speech even for the most accomplished writers; good writing is always reworked, revised, and refined. Whatever features of Black dialect are contained in an individual student's idiolect can, within this approach, be regarded as additional factors subject to the general process of editing. The introduction maintains that all writers have to edit their work, and dialect speakers must learn to edit with specific elements of grammar in mind when they choose to write in the dominant dialect. Editing anything, a film, a book, a theme, is obviously a conscious activity. Therefore dialect-speaking students are faced with a difficult task: to become conscious of the very aspects of language that we are ordinarily least conscious of, those that are morphological in nature.

In the introductory statement, the idea of *expanding* student's ability to manipulate language is stressed rather than the concept of replacing one dialect with another. In fact, the whole issue of dialect is discussed for several reasons. First, it is intended to be intellectually stimulating, providing students with an opportunity to view language differences from various perspectives. Second, it provides a way of understanding and organizing what most students have perceived of in the past as their "mistakes" or their "lousy English." Simply by reducing the number of grammatical features one calls "errors," many students are attitudinally freed to give "one more try" to a subject they have always failed and consequently hated. Third, the notion of dialect supplies the course with a kind of *content* that a basic writing

curriculum might not otherwise have. As Courtney B. Cazden suggests, "It is necessary to design a particular kind of environment for language use, one in which the contrast between language as curriculum content and as learning environment is reduced."<sup>1</sup> As students learn the skill of using language as form, vehicle, instrument, they simultaneously learn language as content, exploring its relationship to thought, its tremendous diversity, its social implications.

After reading and discussing the introduction, students begin the course which is self-paced and divided into five separate but cumulative units. Each is followed by a 200 point post-test which must be passed with a score of ninety per cent before the student progresses to the next unit. Students who do not achieve ninety per cent are given supplementary exercises, alternative explanations, and whatever personalized instruction they need before they can proceed in the course. In each unit, explanations and examples of contrastive grammatical features of BD and EAE are made at appropriate points, but most of the actual exercises involve conversions into Edited American English from Black dialect. We experimented with a fifty-fifty format in which students converted back and forth between the dialects, but met too much resistance from the students themselves. As full-time college students, they are, in most cases, extremely conscious of being unequipped to meet certain academic expectations and are in a hurry to acquire prerequisite skills. Consequently, we developed a system of giving equal time to both dialects in the explanations and examples, but much more time to conversions into EAE in the exercises.

Unit 1 presents the students with an overview of sentence structure by involving them in constructing the most skeletal sentences, those composed of only two words. In this initial exercise, the relationship between the subject and the verb function is stressed. (The word in the subject position names or labels the structural "topic" of the sentence, while the word in the verb position completes the pattern of communication implied and initiated in the naming of a subject.) After this brief overview of the vital components of the simplest sentences, students are informed that the rest of Unit 1 will concern the types of words that can fulfill the *subject function*. Nouns are then defined and students perform exercises circling them in groups that

<sup>1</sup>Courtney B. Cazden, "Problems for Education: Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment," in *Language as a Human Problem*, ed. Einar Haugen and Morton Bloomfield (New York: W. W. Norton, and Co., Inc., 1974), p. 139.

contain all parts of speech. We found that many students, equipped with only a definition and a few examples of the different types of nouns, failed these identification exercises. We then added a section on using noun suffixes including, for example, -ness, -ity, -tion, -ance, and -ment. This addition was designed to deal with what we perceived to be many of our students' inability to distinguish between abstract nouns and adjective and verb forms of the same word.

Once students can consistently identify nouns and convert adjectives and verbs to noun form, they take up the first dialect difference dealt with in the course: the EAE and BD methods of indicating number. Examples are given illustrating how number is suggested by context, often by a single adjective, in Black dialect, but additionally marked, usually with the -s or -es inflection, in Edited American English. For instance:

BD: Max, the neighborhood grocer, gave me a dozen *orange* in return for some information on who's been ripping him off the past few *week*.

EAE: Max, the neighborhood grocer, gave me a dozen *oranges* . . . *weeks*.

The exercises that involve pluralizing nouns also emphasize the various spelling changes (eg., -y to -ies, and -f and -fe to -ves). Special consideration is given to the "exceptions," man, woman, tooth, child, etc., and to the difference between count and mass nouns.

In the next part of Unit 1, students work with those pronouns that can be utilized as subjects: the personal, demonstrative, and indefinite. Within a framework of exercises involving their subject function, students are also taught the skills of pronoun consistency and logical, clear reference. Finally, in the last section of the unit, students use nouns and pronouns as simple subjects, compound subjects, and "hidden" subjects (especially those preceded by more than one modifier and/or possessive noun). A large section is devoted to insuring students' ability to distinguish between grammatical and logical subjects for the express purpose of minimizing difficulty with EAE subject-verb agreement in the next unit, since such errors often derive from improperly identifying the "most important word" or the logical topic as also the structural, grammatical subject.<sup>2</sup> Students are directed to identify the simple subjects of sentences in related groups; for example:

<sup>2</sup>See Valerie Krishna, "The Syntax of Error," *Journal of Basic Writing*, 1 (Spring 1975), 43-49, for an analysis of syntactically weak sentence writing deriving from lack of coincidence of grammatical and logical subjects.

- 1) That dude drives me insane.
- 2) I am driven insane by that dude.
- 3) The ultimate result of my relationship with that dude will be insanity.
- 4) Insanity will result from my relationship with that dude.

This has been one of our most successful exercises, producing a kind of "Now I've got it" reaction in many students who previously had trouble conceptualizing grammatical subjects. Not surprisingly, we find that our students often respond much better to a small number of differentiating examples than to long, often necessarily abstract, explanations.

Unit 2 opens with a restatement of the simple sentence pattern and quickly focuses on the verb function, emphasizing what predicates *do* in relation to subjects. Once the overall context of sentence structure is reestablished, students begin exercises identifying the three types of verbs, those that show the physical action, mental action, or condition of the subject. (In the last category we include the verbs "to be," "to have," and appear, feel, and seem.) When students complete a number of progressively more difficult tasks involving the identification of both subjects and the three types of verbs, their attention is directed toward the unique capacity of verbs to express time. The basic tenses are explained and students begin the second part of the course that specifically concerns dialect differences: the contrasting BD and EAE "rules" for subject-verb agreement. As in the earlier section on forming EAE plural nouns, a concern with spelling changes is incorporated into the exercises. This section demands recollection of much of Unit 1. Students concentrate on making verbs agree with simple and compound subjects and especially those joined with the word "or." Considerable time is devoted to insuring subject-verb agreement when pronouns function as subjects. (In examining the writing samples, we found that disagreement often occurred when "this," "that," "these," "those," many of the indefinite pronouns, and, of course, all of the personal pronouns were used as subjects.) A special section involves one of the verbs that most often and most noticeably differs between the dialects, the verb "to do."

One of the most demanding exercises requires students to rewrite sentences, identifying the subject, changing its number, and then adjusting the verb to agree with it. For example, students convert "In the second scene, the freshman rushes into the union for a frosty mug of Pabst Blue Ribbon" to "In the second scene, the freshmen rush into the union. . ." Similarly, "The clapboard houses by the riverbank



sink slowly into the muck and grime" is converted to "The clapboard house. . .sinks. . ."

Following the subject-verb agreement section, which is taught as a special concern of present tense, students begin to work on past tense regular verbs with special emphasis, naturally, on the -ed ending. Possibly the most unorthodox aspect of this section is a series of exercises on EAE infinitive verb phrases designed to help students avoid such constructions as "I promise to *loved* you." In the next section, one of the course's lengthiest, students deal with the varying EAE and BD forms of the verbs "to be" and "to have." Finally, they learn to use the basic tenses, including the past participles, of approximately fifty frequently used irregular verbs. Whenever possible they are taught in rhyming groups and special treatment is given to verbs that are regular in BD, but irregular in EAE. The most important feature of the second unit is its cumulative nature. Although language learning does not lend itself to perfectly consistent, linear patterns, we found that in each successive section we could expect students to perform exercises which demanded skills they had acquired earlier in the unit.

Unit 3 deals with modifiers which are introduced to students as words used to characterize or describe other words. The adjective section focuses upon suffixes common to adjective forms, such as -able, -ive, -al, -ant, -ic, and -ous. Functional flexibility is emphasized by having students perform activities in which they choose either the noun or adjective form of a word depending upon the particular context of the sentence. Stress is also placed upon the -ed and -ing endings used in forming verbal adjectives or participles. Similarly, adverbs are taught with emphasis on their -ly inflection. Some of the most effective exercises are sentence rewrites involving conversions of adjectives to adverbs (and modified nouns to verbs). For example, students are given the following sentence, "The Secret Service has made *thorough* plans for the capture of any would-be assassins," and are asked to rewrite the sentence, converting the underlined adjective to an adverb, producing "The Secret Service has planned *thoroughly* for the capture of any would-be assassins."

The third type of modifier dealt with in Unit 3 is the possessive noun. Following the format created in earlier sections of the course, students first learn how to mark possession (with an apostrophe plus -s or simply an apostrophe) in EAE, and then apply this skill in contextual editing in which they are required, not only to use the appropriate possessive markers, but also to determine *if* and then *where* possession should be

shown. Finally, in a number of paragraphs and short essays near the end of the unit, students are directed to locate and change usage errors and dialect differences which have been emphasized in Unit 3. The following is an excerpt from one of these exercises; it necessitates five changes:

But, in his book, Dr. Fannel concentrates not on individuals motives for committing suicide, but on the underlying motives of the masses. He emphatic asserts that when people decide to take there own lives, they are really acting out the repression's and anxieties of the society of which their a part.

(Proper use of the homonyms there, their, and they're is one of the miscellaneous skills integrated into this unit.)

Unit 4 is designed to integrate all that students have learned in terms of subjects, verbs, and modifiers into the comprehensive process of sentence construction. The focus of the early part of the unit is on dependent and independent clauses which are presented as the "building blocks" of sentence construction. Students practice combining various dependent and independent clauses with appropriate coordination and subordination. Fragments and run-ons receive special emphasis in the latter portions of Unit 4; students are shown that when dependent and independent clauses are not coordinated or are joined improperly, the results are fragments, run-ons, and ultimately, blocked communication. Exercises involve alternative methods of changing fragments and run-ons to fluent, logical sentence patterns. Students practice these options both in individual sentences and in larger paragraph and essay contexts. Punctuation is taught as a by-product of the skills of coordination and subordination.

In Unit 4 students are also required to deal with the few syntactical differences between Black dialect and Edited American English. Students rewrite sentences such as, "*I asked was she sure, and she answered, 'Can't nobody understand that teacher,'*" using EAE syntactical patterns. (Methods of indicating negation and avoiding the "double negative" are also handled in this context.)

The last unit of the course is primarily an *editing* unit and, in this sense, is the culmination of what we have emphasized to students throughout the course, namely, that good writing is the product of a conscious and careful editing and refining process. In Unit 5 students apply all of the skills they have learned (or relearned) throughout the course to correcting errors, manipulating EAE inflections, and restructuring sentences within the process of rewriting sample themes, essays,

and short stories. Our own experiences as teachers and evaluators of others' writing have convinced us of how valuable an experience editing another person's work can be in terms of sharpening one's consciousness of how language works. Unit 5, then, provides our students with this kind of experience and duplicates the editing process we hope they will begin to apply in their own college writing. For example, by the end of the fifth unit, students are expected to be able to edit the following excerpt from a sample theme introduction:

In one sense, his novels might be consider little sermons address to the struggling masses at the bottom of society. Alger's message is very clear — avoid bad habit like smoking, drinking, and swearing, work until your ready to drop, save every meager penny you earn, and eventually, society will reward you with riches and fame. If one were to summarize Alger theme in one short sentence, it would be "Riches come to those who deserve them." And, of course, the obvious corollary to this statement is that those who is poor in our society also somehow deserve there fate. I believe that one can learn a great deal about our value system by studying Horatio Alger's novels because the sermon he preach is one that American society still deeply believe in. I intend to examine how Alger's characters reflect this naive American belief in the myth of the self-made man. Who is always somehow rewarded by society for his hard work and virtue living.

Several of the changes students are expected to make in this excerpt can only be made on the basis of context clues. Students are not instructed to edit any one specific aspect of language, but instead must depend upon sentence context for direction. Though Unit 5 demands considerably more sophisticated and eclectic contextual editing than do the other units of the course, reliance upon context is an essential feature throughout. Besides moving students to an ever-increasing independence, this reliance is particularly important in facilitating the transfer from Black dialect to Edited American English. Because of the specific nature of the differences between the dialects, it is necessary to direct the students' attention to the way tense, number, and possession are often indicated by word order and modifiers (context) in BD, but are additionally marked with inflections in EAE. The kinds of demands placed upon students in Unit 5 — in which they must apply all the skills they have acquired with little overt, specific direction — represent the "end-point" of our developmental objective to make students conscious editors of others' work, as well as the "starting-point" of integrated application of these skills to their own writing.

We are still in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of our course. Our experience to this point, however, suggests that the success

or failure of any such course is in large part dependent upon a number of interrelated factors not the least of which concerns the willingness of colleges and universities to accord legitimate status to developmental education. Requiring students to acquire prerequisite, basic skills in a non-credit context in which needed skill work functions primarily as a time-consuming adjunct to regular course requirements not only places an added burden upon students, but also reinforces their feelings of inadequacy and failure. Further, the kind of disjointedness which results from the ancillary status of non-credit developmental courses defeats what is perhaps the primary goal of a course such as ours, which is to integrate language skills into the larger process of thinking and writing. It is absolutely essential in this regard that students be shown the relationship between language and the thought process, and between sentence, paragraph, and essay structure.

Finally, to any of those who may still insist that teaching Edited American English is denying students the right to their own language, we offer this excerpt from one of our writing samples. This student had been asked to write about what he wanted for his future. Readers may draw their own conclusions as to his rights, and perhaps more significantly, his *needs*:

I want to have me a job working behind a desk, because working in a foundry all my life wouldn't be cool. I'd be collecting dust in my systems and burn from the machines. I looks at the people's in my family, they looks so awful that I said ain't know way I'm going to be in that same situation. So that I want to finish my education, so I know I can get a good job.

## TOTAL IMMERSION

The Queens College program in teaching writing to Open Admissions freshmen had been successful enough, by the spring of 1975, to make us wish that our students could profit from it before, not while, taking their first college courses. We also wished to test the belief that a writing course can properly be paired with practice in reading, especially if the students' own writing is the primary text. So, in the summer of 1975, the College Summer Session sponsored a six-week program in reading and writing, encouraged by Betsy Kaufman as part of the work of the College Skills Center which she directs.

I'll go on to speak soberly about the program, which was, day in and day out, a celebration. But the tale would be false with no mention of the festive element, which was unplanned. Besides, though celebration does not appear in the syllabus, it may be repeatable, for it was not a festival of indolence. It was rather the high spirits I imagine among those newly recruited to work out with the Yankee farm team or just admitted to the heady and rigorous practises of the Royal Ballet School. Perhaps such festive enjoyment is what we should expect of work which is human, intense, and visibly productive.

We called the course Total Immersion, since we met from 4 pm to 9 pm four days a week. Twenty-eight students with high-school averages below 75 and English 001 placement on the Cooperative Test worked with two members of the Department of English — myself, bodily present, and Sandra Schor, mystery correspondent, present in weekly letters; five undergraduate team-teachers on three of the four evenings; and part-time support from four or five CETA people.

Students chose to join the group after hearing it described at the Orientation Assembly and at registration in May; we noted that this self-selection was chiefly from among students who had not found full-time summer work.

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Well, we had work for them, academic work, from which we all emerged exhausted but exhilarated at the end of the program. Team teachers and I spent, in addition to class time, four hours a week — and many off-moments — discussing plans and rationale generally and each student's work particularly.

We used standard tests before and after, and recorded no staggering over-all changes in test scores. The slightly higher final scores were not discouraging for we felt we lacked instruments calibrated to gauge the real and dramatic changes in students' work. One measurable fact did emerge: out of the 3360 man-hours of scheduled classes, there were 32 man-hours of absence; four people were absent once, and one person was absent because of illness four times. No one dropped out.

Since irregular attendance is often a severe handicap in teaching Open Admissions students, since the work we did was constant, demanding, and intense, and since the room we used was very hot in a hot summer, we felt the students showed by their presence that they wanted to do the work the program offered.

I therefore venture to describe what I hope are the repeatable elements of the program.

It was preceded by thinking again, as we must each time we plan a course, of the real questions implicit in it: What is writing, that I should teach it in this course? Who, as writers, are these students, that I should try to teach them?

To the first I answered that as language embodies thought, so writing embodies language, extending thought into time and space, making thought recoverable — an amazing instrument, agreeable, suited to a lifetime of skilled use.

To the second I answered that student writers come to us with 18 years of experience and with 18 years of experience with language. They come with 12 years of school experience so varied that while we see all freshmen know something, we can assume little about the facts, attitudes, and skills transmitted to them, not even that schools have been the transmitters. We can assume of their work as readers and writers of English little save that it is probably scanty, and that not much in their lives, in or out of school, has stirred them to prize reading or writing. I answered further with my own belief that inability to read and write readily is not only a bar to college work but an impairment of personal freedom and a lifelong handicap to thought.

For Total Immersion there came, out of these honest pieties, two ideas: a general aim, that we would teach reading and writing as preparation for college work and also as essential skills for all, even for

those whose lives might not allow them more than a few semesters of college; and a defined aim, that students would end the course willing, ready, and able (a) to write in 50 minutes, 350 words of coherent non-fiction prose, beginning and ending with a relatively abstract statement and supported in the middle paragraphs by one or more anecdotes or examples drawn from their own experience; and (b) to read a piece of writing from an essay to a book, to report accurately their observations about it, and to derive from their observations an idea, an inference, about the text.

To work toward these aims, I had the core of a syllabus for developing writing which had served my work in English 001 for several years, and a view of developing reading which was closely allied to it. Though I had tested the ideas about reading chiefly against experience with my seven children, I would have access all summer to the expert counsel of Betsy Kaufmann and the College Skills Center staff. Everything in the writing syllabus had grown out of my decade of professional experience as a writer. The extracurricular origins of the Total Immersion syllabus may account for its assumption — which I think sensible — that those who read and write with competence can do so in many modes, including but not usually starting with expository prose.

The syllabus teaches whole structures. It begins with shapes found in literature of the oral tradition, for these shapes have by their spontaneous recurrence and long survival, even among students who have read little, proven that they are congenial to the human mind. It is a natural, central starting place.

So Total Immersion began with the writing of a fable. We presented it as a submerged structure, so that the students had written a fable before we named or described it, and were able to discover its two parts in their own work. We talked about the correct punctuation of dialogue as though that were our sole objective. Then we asked them to write, paragraph by paragraph, a dialogue between a deer and a bear. Here is a sample from among papers by native speakers of English; graphics (punctuation and spelling) have been corrected. It is by Curtis Whitehead:

The big exhausted bear sat down. He was so tired a deer came right up to him and laughed at him and said, "I thought you were so strong, but here you are all wore out."

"I been running from these two hunters," said the bear. "I do not think they'll quit until they catch me," said the big exhausted bear.

The deer without thinking twice said, "I learned a trick when I heard

some bears talking once. I been chased by hunters for days, many of times, but I know how to get them off my tail."

"I will be grateful to you if you will show me a few tricks on getting rid of hunters," said the bear.

The deer thought he was very intelligent because of the tricks he had learned. Without hesitating he was happy to show the bear how to operate.

"This is my best trick," said the deer. "Find some other animal in these woods that the hunters will try to get instead, and lead the hunters to him while you split."

The bear said, "I might have someone in mind that I might have bumped into today. Thanks for the advice."

Suddenly he jumped behind a tree. The hunters came and shot the deer and carried him away. The bear said as he walked home, "It doesn't pay to talk smarter than you are."

The moral of this story is: True understanding is not just hearing someone else's words.

Both parts of this two-part structure are structures in themselves, the first a narrative, the second an aphorism. The narrative is concrete, the aphorism abstract.

Abstract and concrete are terms the meaning of which is crucial to the writer who wants to control his writing. So, having written fables in a large group, we divided into small groups of 5 or 6, each with a team teacher, to examine them. We dwelt long on each one, not only admiring but naming their parts and particular moments of success. Words we would use often in the course (narrative, aphorism, concrete, abstract) became part of their vocabulary that evening.

Practise in reading began as they read their fables aloud. Their own work was our chief text, though we paralleled its use with printed works. In asking them to respond to each other's readings, we first related the ideas of concrete and abstract to the ideas of observation and inference. We suggested that since everyone was expected to respond to each reading, no one would be at a loss for words if we were to respond concretely, saying what we remembered or noticed of what we had heard. Comments which were inferences (for instance, on the simplest level, "Terrific!" or "I didn't think it was interesting, did you?") were to be saved until we had heard enough observations to support or alter them.

Weeks of tactful reminders to tell the writer about what he had said, and how, rather than about the hearer's feelings, resulted in an active and articulate climate of response based on accurate hearing; listeners were not only attentive but often useful critics. Students used to observing exactly what is said and written are in shape both to criticize and to



learn from others' language. The habit of making plentiful observations engages and activates the mind, I think. We soon found our students grouping their observations and using them to explain inferences.

The first response to our fables was surprise and pleasure at their success. There are those who feel suspicious of work which engenders pleasure, but in a writing class, at least, I would debate with them. Such pleasure is neither unstructured nor soft-headed. It is rather the first step in evoking the quantity of constant writing—in and out of school, with and without assignments—which alone makes writers proficient.

After several sessions of writing fables, considering alternative morals or aphorisms, using each other's aphorisms as starting points for new fables, discussing the elegance of well-phrased abstractions, we read Aesop and LaFontaine and discussed their work too. Having used the form themselves, our students had a context for noticing what Aesop does and a personal interest in the reasons for his success.

The syllabus moved us from fables to parables, and we wrote stories with implicit morals. We read a variety of tales—Sufi stories, African stories, Jewish, French, Chinese stories—in *World Harvest of Folk Tales*, a rich mix. Students not only wrote and read but memorized and told stories. One Persian student, far less able to write than to speak well in English, had a fund of parables learned from his family. His success in telling them to us helped him to endure his labors on form and syntax. Work in small groups continued to distinguish observation from inference, abstract from concrete.

We next all read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Lattimore's or Fitzgerald's translations, and tried our hands at writing not epic poems but little versions of myths and romances. We also wrote riddles, noting the specific query and the general answer. Riddles call for a careful selectiveness in details. Here is a sample by Delaine Jones.

People use me all year round. My shape is like a boomerang with one end open. I am considered as a part of clothing. I come in many colors. I am used on the lower part of the body. What am I?

This riddle produced wild and ribald guesses before it was answered: a sock. And we took the punning play as a sign of lively interest in language.

We wrote rhymes too, and paeons and curses; along with them we read ballads and poems.

Sitting in a big circle and passing papers to the right after writing, we wrote rhymes in couplets—first, a single line ending in a rhymable

word; thereafter, a line rhyming to the one already written on the page, plus a line ending rhymably for the next customer to rhyme. In half an hour we had twenty-eight twelve-line sets of couplets, fairly zany but full of verbal high jinks. The first set was done as a birthday present for the very shyest young woman in the class. A week later, when another woman had a birthday she demanded equal time, and everyone seemed pleased to grant it. Mother Goose not John Dryden was our common ground in setting this exercise forth. We went round the circle reciting what we could recall of childhood jingles. Lovers of letters can be grateful to Disneyland, if for nothing else, for keeping alive seminal bits of rhyme and fable for children who might without cartoons of them be the poorer.

Beginning by reading the resounding power of Biblical prophecy, we proposed the curse as a two-part structure for imitation. One student, a marvelous story-teller and a brutally unable writer, at once saw the likeness to what he described as a rank-out street game, "the dozenses." (In deference to the women present, he kindly and firmly instructed us as we began to write, "OK now, no mothers.") Samples:

"No wonder you gonna get no where  
You got acne on your hair!" and,  
"You think you are dy-no-mite  
But you dinosaur, good night!"

Because our sessions ran from 4 pm to 9 pm, we needed a supper break but did not want to waste time or slacken attention. Nor did we want to dissipate the sense of community by wandering off to look for eating places. So we brown-bagged sandwiches and emptied the soft-drink machine we were lucky enough to have in our classroom-lounge. While we ate, we usually had a speaker, a reader, or a film to attend to. One night we had as guest a young Englishman, Brian Murphy, who has a repertoire of ballads.

He stood in the center of our circle and sang to us, unaccompanied, for an hour. The effect of the human voice solo is wonderfully moving. One usually cool young woman clutched my arm as he began and whispered, "My Lord, he's brave!" He made good listeners of us. He made us feel that rhythm and rhyme and a poetic voice are natural to man; once again, the literature worked its powerful energizing effect because someone trusted that it would.

For we had planned, according to the syllabus, to follow Brian's singing with a quick experiment—a half hour of having students read aloud to each other from our collection of anthologies of poetry. When

the half hour was up, no one wanted to stop. Two hours later, well beyond the time for the class to close, people were still sitting with books in hand, saying, "Just let me read this one. It's short."

I had taken care to provide, among the books, a good proportion of strong contemporary poets—Lee, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Giovanni. The students tried them and set them aside in favor of "something that you can see he had to work on," Wyatt and Surrey, Herrick and Keats. I have no explanation for this, save a suspicion that as philogeny recapitulates ontogeny, the growth of expertise in language recapitulates the history of literature. Anyway, it was a fine evening. I hope it restored to our students the sure knowledge that poetry belongs to them if to anyone.

The first two and a half weeks spent on reading and writing material derived from the oral tradition developed more than a shared set of terms. It made us all especially sensitive to the over-all shape of a masterful piece of writing, since the shapes with which we worked were all certified by ages of conventional use and short enough to be readily perceived. Besides, we had not just defined them, or even just uncovered them in our reading of classic texts; we had written them ourselves first, and begun our understanding of them in completing the shapes of our own writings.

The syllabus continues in the oral tradition, but gradually shifts from imaginative use of conventional forms to narratives drawn from memory. There is a clear echo of oral tradition in the stories families tell about themselves or adults remember about their childhood. These are the anecdotes, polished by memory, which adults use to suggest models of behavior to their children, and which adults use to reaffirm a sense of the roots of their identity.

We asked students to write, non-stop for ten minutes, about their memories of a favorite childhood hiding place. We read these aloud and commented on them as usual. Then they wrote for another ten minutes on what they remembered of their first day in school, and we read the results. I now think I would have done better to start with family stories, since I now see how closely the shaping of our elder's twice-told tales lies to the shape of parable.

Interest in listening and commenting on each others' stories ran especially high that night. The narratives were vivid, the language fresh; the tones varied from cherishing to sardonic. I commented for a few minutes on tone, once again grateful for my team-teachers' training in literature which enabled them to observe such distinctions fruitfully. It is by treating our students' writing as literature—which, as far

as we are concerned, it is—that we can find plenty of cogent, usable things to comment on positively.

We asked them to choose one of the childhood stories, rewrite it in class, and take it home to rewrite thoroughly, adding, subtracting, and refining until they thought it sounded just right. Readings and comments in their small groups helped ready them for this effort at revision. Many of the comments asked for more details (“What door of the school did you go in?”; “Did your mother know you were hanging out in her closet?”) and many of the rewrites provided them.

They went on to write out of family tradition, stories told by grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents. How did grandparents first meet? What shoes did grandma wear to her wedding? What was grandma’s first day in school like? As always, all of us did the writing assignments, and when we read them to our groups, I was reminded of Northrop Frye’s remarks on how imagination shapes memory, “constructing possible models of human experience.” The correspondences between what we wrote and what we hoped ran deep but visibly in this assignment.

There is in the syllabus a vital move. We wanted to use our short personal narratives in writing essays having the structure of formal exposition. This transposition is the fulcrum of the course. As I see it, the structure basic to exposition begins with an abstract or general statement or paragraph which is explored, explained, or demonstrated in middle paragraphs and concluded by a final abstract or general statement. Beginning with the third week, we turned to writing in this shape.

We reviewed the ideas of abstract and concrete, of observation and inference. We explained the rationale behind the syllabus as we had so far experienced it. We reread the rewritten versions of stories about parents and grandparents. Then we spent two hours talking over what we had noticed in the stories and in the experience of writing them, and what kinds of idea we might infer from what we had noticed. We used free writing in non-stop ten-minute bursts to provoke a large, varied, and visible group of suitable general ideas. Since we had already worked on generalizing sentences that were both abstract and elegant, students were willing—because able—to work on the sketches of notions they had jotted down until they not only made sense but sounded elegant.

Students now had both an anecdotal narrative and a fitting general statement they had derived from thinking about the narrative. They had also learned from practise, by dividing their comments in discus-

sion into observation and inference, that it is from specific knowledge that understanding of general statements grows.

We were now asking them to reverse the order in which we naturally think, by putting the general statement first as a statement of thesis and following it with a specific narrative as an example or demonstration of their thesis. We spent two weeks in getting these parts to move as an integrated whole.

By the end of the fourth week, we had written and revised two essays, 500-700 words each, that told family stories introduced and concluded with general statements. Among the opening sentences:

Since 1935, everything in New York City has changed except the way people fall in love

Children don't need to spend a dime to have a good time

My grandmother is as close as I will ever get to having a fairy godmother, (revised after discussion with fellow students to, A grandma is as close as most people ever get to having a fairy-tale godmother).

During the final six sessions, using the form rehearsed in the two essays as models, they wrote an essay every evening. We gave them one-word topics (e.g., schoolyard, panic, daydream, highway) to develop. We also gave them blue books to write in. I hoped by this stratagem to prevent in them some of the uneasiness I still feel in the presence of blue books, countless semesters after I was last subject to examination in them.

We treated these essays differently. Instead of reading them to each other at once, we team teachers took them home to comment on, paying especially heed to structure, sentences, and verb forms. We discussed them in small groups the following night, before going on to write another essay. We even discovered a way to improve handwriting, which was already noticeably better than the first week's samples—students exchanged papers to read them aloud. (We never did get our Persian student to write all his o's and a's above the line.)

One woman, particularly quick-witted and eager, said after writing a couple of these blue-book essays, "Can you suggest some other structure I could try? I think I've got this one where I won't forget it." (We showed those interested how they might use some of the logical three-part ways of developing middle paragraphs: too big, too little, just right; how it used to be, how it may become, how it now is; how I see it, how my friends see it, how the wide world sees it; conservative, revolutionary, moderate; etc.)

The last half-dozen impromptu essays were, some of them, five to

ten times as long as the essays written for the placement examination. They had structure. Not every student wrote in sentences all the time, but many mostly did. True, there were plenty of errors—especially in spelling, which I am still trying to learn how to teach—but the errors occurred in a more adventurous text. And nobody hated writing them. The reader could sense their willingness to tell him something. More, they were written by individuals sure enough of their own voice to make it heard, and the reader could sense that too.

What I have described so far is a syllabus that was one, perhaps the main, stream in this white-water course. Confluent with it, inextricably mixed, were four other streams:

1. Ten minutes of daily exercise in non-stop free writing at home, ten more in class; frequent in-class recourse to such writing as a provider of written language in response to readings, speakers, films, ideas

2. Grammar through use of a programmed workbook at home for twenty minutes a day, and through comments on papers and conferences with team teachers spent chiefly in identifying what was right and showing where the right way could be substituted for the wrong

3. Readings (parallel to composition of structured pieces) of literature in books, and readings (parallel to free writing) of any book that struck their fancy

4. Efforts to sustain a community of workers, grounded in the college and extending beyond our class, based on the narrow but profound exchange writers and readers know, on a shared frame of reference in literature, and on a remarkable series of softball games and swims in which team teachers, CETA people, and students voluntarily spent many hours together outside our long day in class.

“Free writing” is a practise long known to writers in one version or another—jotting, scribbling, keeping notes or a notebook. It has gained currency as a classroom technique since the Plowden Report discussed its use in British schools in 1958. It is no gimmick but a tremendously rich and not unconventional kind of associative writing. Those who have heard of it as a mere device for undisciplined self-expression or amateur psychologizing may find it disappointing on first trial. When used fittingly, however, it gives writers direct and error-free access to their own language.

We began, on the second evening of Total Immersion, by asking students to write for ten minutes without a halt, writing “the the the” if they got stuck for ideas, paying no particular heed to spelling or sentence structure or sequence of ideas.

We did free writing at least once during every session, and required

students to write for ten minutes every night, seven nights a week, at home. It was our main text for the course. We felt that we could teach both rhetorical and grammatical structures from it. For the structures of language, obviously, inhere in language itself. To discover them there first is more memorable than to meet them in rulebooks; to know that one has produced what the rule discusses is to make the rule more memorable.

Students did their free writing in bound composition books, old-fashioned mottle-covered ones. We began each evening by reading aloud from these books; it was a good way to guarantee that the work be done. Response to it came from both team teachers and students in small groups, orally, and from one or two team teachers in written comments. We tried to find 10 or 20 minutes in the course of each evening to look at each student's writings, the oral response following the mode we had established in discussing fables. Some students produced page after page of fascinating non-stop writing, once they felt free to "make mistakes." One wrote half a dozen free-writing fables full of charm though lacking all sense of the graphics that would make them intelligible to most readers. But at least he got the stories out on the page where work with his team teacher could rescue them for the rest of us. Five minutes with pencil in hand will provide even the most inarticulate with something cogent to say when their turn comes. We used it to collect our thoughts after listening to a lecture or viewing a film, to summarize impressions of books we read, to review what we could recall of the week's work in grammar.

Yes, we did formal as well as informal work in grammar. It was of three kinds. First, we used a programmed work book, Joseph Blumenthal's *English 3200*, as an assigned out-of-class work to make students realize how they may themselves control their knowledge of the rules. *English 3200* puts students in close, frequent contact with thousands of finely articulated models of sentence structures, written correctly. While they answer the questions it asks they also perforce take in the look of correct usage on the page. *English 3200* states the rules clearly and follows them by examples which progress very, very gradually in complexity. Perhaps not a perfect solution (it contains no sentence I would long to have written), it is certainly for me a good one, since I have not been able even to think of devising examples which move—as they should and as these do—in so many many tiny steps.

With students whose school experience in grammar has taught them to fail it or to find it hermetic and jargon-laden, *English 3200* serves to make the paradigms familiar and less threatening. Besides, since as-



signments in it were done outside the class's central reading and writing (as real writers in the real world might use dictionaries or other standardizing aids), we could keep the emphasis in class on elegant and expressive communication rather than on error.

The second part of our work in grammar was an extension of the way, described above, in which we responded to free writing. We taught not from faults but from strength—from examples, identified in the students' work, of complete sentences; of coordination; of the one correct verb form out of a dozen non-standard uses of the third person singular, present tense. It is just as practical and logical to signal what is good as to red-pencil what is wrong—and it is decidedly easier for a student to fix in mind.

The third effort in grammar was in the form of short talks on major matters, like proper subordination (as a way of avoiding fragments, which are often errors in graphics rather than in syntax), co-ordination (which produced a wave of work sprinkled—often admirably—with semi-colon), and minor irritants like the spelling of the contraction for “it is.” The point of view of these talks was that of my own experiences as a writer.

Work in reading was meshed with work in writing. Reading our own and each other's work, we examined the language closely—a useful skill. This and other reading skills derive from a primary response of pleasure. We relied on books themselves to generate it. We read two a week, one assigned, one chosen. Assigned were: Aesop, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, folk tales, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Hamlet*.

The 200 volumes of the class library were there because one of us had found them irresistible. They were long, short, easy, hard, new old, in all genres. Many had gripping narratives. On Thursdays, when my fellow team teachers were absent, I asked students to talk in small groups about their books so that others would want to read them too.

Their conversation was like that heard at any literary party: “There's a scene at the end where he . . .”; “She's married to this horrible guy, and. . . .” Their demeanor showed the awesome extent to which instructors are models of behaviour, for each student acted to replace the absent team teacher by encouraging the shy, calming the explosive, and keeping the talk to the matter at hand.

After the conversation, we free-wrote for ten minutes about our books. Then we tried to condense our opinions onto index cards which remained with the books for others to consult when choosing what to read next. Emphasis remained on enjoyment. But I soon heard many remarks that reflected the distinction between observation and in-



ference which we were practising faithfully in talk about our own writing.

Though my handling of writing about reading was clumsy and inexperienced, the good books in the collection did have the effect we'd hoped for: choosing the week's book was a cheerful event. Reading with no motive but pleasure (side by side with reading our manuscripts and literature related to our writing) meant that we were behaving, at least for the duration of the course, like habitual readers. The most popular books (5 or more readers) exhibit the mixed nature of our library: Carlos Castenedas' *Teachings of Don Juan*; the *Viking Book of Ballads of the English-Speaking World*, Vol. 1; Domenick Yezzo's *A GI's Vietnam Diary* (it was our good luck to have Mr. Yezzo as one of the undergraduate team teachers).

Most of the team teachers and CETA helpers had the advantage of previous experience in Queen College's team-teaching program and in the Writing Skills Workshop, where they had been trained as tutors under Judy Fishman. Their active and creative work gave the breath of life to our syllabus and schedules; they were true colleagues.

Perhaps the ultimate example of collegiality was that of Sandra Schor, our glorious Mystery Correspondent. To her, in a class hour or two each week, students wrote letters; from her, in class, they each received an envelope containing her reply. This exchange was, I think, a kind of transcendental paradigm of the effectiveness of Total Immersion. The read and written word, alive outside the classroom, was the only vehicle of communication. Students never knew who their cherished Ms. Mystery was, until her visit one gala evening in the sixth week. No team teachers interfered; the letters were private. Sandra Schor's Correspondence never lapsed into corrections, into shades of Dear Abby, but remained time after time a model of civil discourse. With gifted teacherly and literary expertise, she kept up a dialogue that both evoked and tested each student's separate growth as reader and writer.

I can neither quantify nor summarize the value of Total Immersion. Given a choice, however, this would be the way I'd always teach the basic writing course.

## LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION: THREE MASTERY LEARNING COURSES IN ONE CLASSROOM

People who learn to swim, play a musical instrument, or drive a car usually accept having to learn each step thoroughly and sequentially because they seem to recognize that accomplishment in each of these activities requires, indeed demands, mastering one step before going on to the next. They willingly study the theory and then apply what they have learned to practical problems, and they recognize that constant practice is probably the best way to acquire and retain effortless proficiency, to make the pattern of doing a part of themselves rather than a formula or procedure outside themselves which they follow mechanically. Yet when people are faced with learning to write reports or essays for college courses or for their jobs, many of them begin the writing course with a totally different attitude toward learning, protesting that they have always hated English, that they are bored trying to write reports, or that they have tried but know they cannot succeed—that nothing ever turns out the way they want it. However, most of these people *can* learn to write—if not during the semester in which they have enrolled, then in subsequent semesters after they have discovered that learning to write effectively is important to them and after they have learned to approach writing in the same way they approach other types of learning.

During the past five years at American River College, a two-year college in Sacramento, California, we have been able to help students overcome their negative feelings and to master writing step by step, by developing a sequential approach through individualizing instruction in sentence, paragraph, and essay writing—using self-instructional study units, self-pacing, open entry and exit, and tutors to help students master concepts and write effectively. Now we are offering all

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three sequential courses in one classroom in a course called Language and Composition in order to eliminate the stigma of "bonehead" English and the need for placement testing before students enter a writing class. The new program, now in its fourth semester, has been simple to organize and has proved to be effective in several ways.

Fourteen instructors, working in teams of two, are now teaching nine sections of 50 students each. As a result, we can accommodate twice as many students in each classroom during prime hours as we did before offering Language and Composition. Our program began in 1969 when I offered individualized instruction in sentence writing and developed all the course materials, which are now published.<sup>1</sup> A year later three other instructors individualized paragraph writing and wrote their own material. Then, working alone or in teams, we individualized several sections of essay writing. Finally, in 1974, seven of us, teaching in teams of two, offered four sections of Language and Composition, using my text for sentence writing and a series of study units developed for paragraph and essay writing.<sup>2</sup>

## DIAGNOSTIC TESTING

To determine where students begin, we administer the Writing Pretest, which another colleague and I developed about four years ago. Interestingly, the results seem to be essentially the same every semester. Approximately one-third of the students qualify for essay writing, one-half for paragraph writing, and one-sixth for sentence writing.

Next, we give the Sentence Pretest, a test developed for the Building Sentences unit of the text. Each exercise consists of two sentences for students to analyze and directions for the students to generate similar kinds of sentences. So that the students are not blocked by some of the terminology, each exercise also contains an example. When we compared the scores on the Writing Pretest with those on the Sentence Pretest in the first semester, we discovered that in several cases there were wide discrepancies between the two test scores. As the semester progressed and we saw the students' paragraphs and essays, we ob-

<sup>1</sup>Helen Mills, *Commanding Sentences* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>Helen Mills, *Commanding Paragraphs and Essays* (Carmichael, California: Quest Publishers, 1975) (*Commanding Paragraphs* is being published by Scott, Foresman and Company in 1976).

served that the Sentence Pretest, in which they generated their own sentences, was a better predictor of their writing style than the Writing Pretest, which actually is a proofreading exercise. (However, we have not abandoned the Writing Pretest because we can score it at the end of the first class meeting by having students exchange papers; as a result, they know immediately what text to purchase and where to begin working.) The Sentence Pretest takes only about five minutes to score, but the person reading the students' sentences has to know exactly what he is looking for in each kind of sentence if he is to score the test rapidly. A chart listing all the test exercises on the first page where scores are entered gives a quick diagnostic picture of what the student's sentence writing problems are.

## ASSIGNING STUDY UNITS

What happens next may sound complicated, mainly because we have all three beginning points in one class and the flexibility to assign subsequently whatever study units each student should complete to reach his goal of writing effective expository essays. However, making the assignments is actually simple. Those who receive 0-54 percent on the Writing Pretest begin working in the sentence writing text, which consists of 57 lessons followed by exercises in nine study units, each of which is followed by a Unit Review, Form A and Form B. If students receive 85 percent on the Unit Review, they go on to the next unit. If they do not, they get help from us and the tutors, correct their tests, and take Form B. To those who appear discouraged, we explain that they have already mastered 55 or 65 percent and that they have to learn only another twenty or thirty percent to demonstrate mastery of the unit. This positive approach helps tremendously. In addition, we ask them to repeat only those sections in which they have missed several items. As a result, most students pass the second time.

The second group, those who receive 55 to 65 percent on the Writing Pretest, begin Unit One of the paragraph writing text to study organizational patterns of paragraphs, and they also work on lessons in the Building Sentences unit over a nine-week period to prepare them for the Sentence Posttest, which they must pass with a grade of 80 percent. Those who receive 66 to 100 percent on the Writing Pretest begin essay writing; however, if they do not receive 80 percent on the Sentence Pretest, they must also complete lessons in the Building Sentences unit

for the first nine weeks of the semester. The students, as a result, learn to apply what they have learned in the sentence writing unit to the sentences they write for paragraphs and essays. In both the paragraph and essay writing courses the unit tests are the paragraphs and essays the students write. For paragraph writing we also use a paragraph posttest and an essay posttest to determine whether the students understand the organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays. The procedure throughout the semester is to give the students the course material they seem able to cope with and to evaluate their accomplishment.

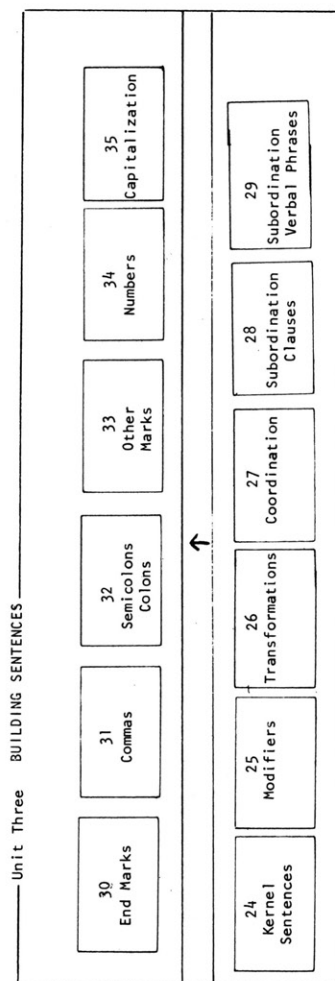
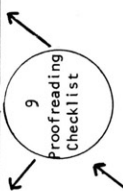
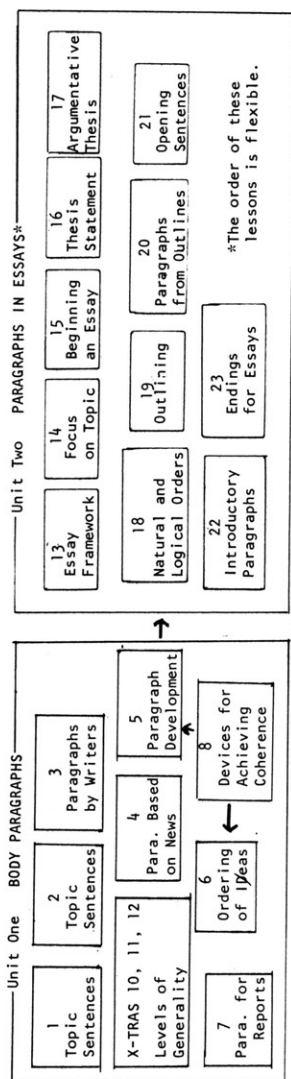
## THE STUDY UNITS

Although the Language and Composition course consists of three parts—sentence writing, paragraph writing, and essay writing—we do not focus on only one aspect of any of these. Sentence writing, for example, cannot be only the study of grammar. Students also study the patterns of sentences and the relationship of ideas. They practice joining and embedding sentences, and they learn to use punctuation in relation to the grammatical constructions. Paragraph writing is also more than learning to organize ideas into paragraphs. Because paragraphs are also made up of sentences, the students review sentence writing to refine their writing style and study the relationship of ideas in several sentences. In addition, paragraph writing includes a study not only of body paragraphs but also of introductory paragraphs and endings for essays because part of the purpose of studying paragraphs is to prepare students to write them well for essays. And essay writing, though it concentrates on the writing of various kinds of essays, does not ignore the additional study of paragraphs and sentences.

The sentence writing study units, based on structural grammar, cover two basic sentence patterns and nouns and verbs in the first unit. In the second unit students learn that modifiers are additions to basic sentence patterns and learn to add them to their kernel sentences. By the time they finish Unit Three, which covers three more sentence patterns, they are able to generate simple sentences to match any of the patterns. Unit Four covers coordination—compound sentences, coordinate adjectives, appositives, and the punctuation related to each of these. Unit Five covers pronouns and subject-verb agreement. By the time students reach Unit Six, they are able to begin to put variety into

# COMMANDING PARAGRAPHS

## Relationship of the Parts



the writing, and when they study subordination in Unit Six, they really begin to be able to manipulate language to fit their needs. In this unit they learn that adverbial and adjective clauses are modifiers, additions to sentences, and that noun clauses are integral parts of sentences. They become fascinated with combining sentences in several different ways. At this point many choose to begin paragraph writing; however, those who go on with Unit Seven learn how to subordinate with verbal phrases. In Unit Eight they review all the punctuation they have studied in the first seven units, and in Unit Nine they learn about parallel structures, point of view, and editing techniques.

The accompanying chart shows the relationship of the study units for paragraph writing. At the bottom is the study of sentences, which is the basis for understanding the conventions of punctuation, lessons for which are just above. The writer is then prepared to proofread and edit what he has written with this knowledge, summarized in the points listed in Lesson 8, "Editing and Proofreading Checklist." The Building Sentences unit is the foundation for both the study of Unit One, Body Paragraphs, and Unit Two, Paragraphs in Essays. Within Unit One are lessons on understanding levels of generality and devices for achieving coherence, both of which provide background for writing topic sentences, developing paragraphs, and ordering ideas. Unit One, then, serves as the basis for understanding the essay, actually a macroparagraph, and prepares the student for Unit Two, which covers focusing on a topic, thesis statements, ordering of ideas, outlining, introductory paragraphs and endings for essays.

The essay writing units begin with a review of thesis statements and paragraphs that make up the essay. Then one unit demonstrates how students can write an essay based on an essay they have read. Still another explains how to read essays. The last unit gives a step-by-step approach to writing a research paper, and the remaining units give patterns for writing a problem-solution essay, comparison and contrast, scientific and technical reports, and an essay using analysis, division, classification, and definition. My students choose their own topics, then select the method of development that suits their topic best, and use the study unit as a pattern.

## STRATEGIES

To help students become aware of the techniques they are using to

write their paragraphs and essays and to help us evaluate what they have written, we ask them to label the topic sentences in paragraphs and thesis statements in essays. In fact, we insist on reading the thesis statement and supporting topic sentences before they write the full essay. In this way we save time reading the preliminary drafts, and they save time by getting our approval before spending several hours writing the full paper. Because we are familiar with the general outline of the paper, we save time in evaluating the final draft.

For some paragraph assignments the students label the kinds of development they have used, the ordering of ideas, or repeated terms, pronouns and their antecedents, transitional expressions, and parallel structures. As they gradually go through these steps, they develop an increasing awareness of ways to make their writing clear and coherent, and they produce commendable paragraphs and essays.

Another very successful strategy is using levels of generality to determine and indicate relationship of ideas. I tried this approach because at least half of my students in other semesters could not understand primary and secondary supporting ideas. I think the words *primary* and *secondary* cause the trouble. However, the majority—at least 85 percent—have no trouble ranking ideas when they can use numbers to show relationship. For those who do have difficulty I have developed three supplementary lessons which seem to help eliminate the problem.

Still another strategy is having students bring in news clippings to use as the basis for paragraphs. With the details in hand, they do not spend time feeling frustrated and staring into space but go to work immediately on a topic that interests them. What they learn in the process of organizing the details for their own paragraphs is the difference between news writing and expository writing. Because they attach the stories to their paragraphs, we do not have to be concerned at that point with documentation. In addition, they get excellent practice in paraphrasing, in preparation for the research they do for later essays. Our bonus is being able to read paragraphs based on a variety of current topics instead of being confined to a limited number of assigned topics.

So that students understand our evaluation of organization and sentence structure, we have developed a series of five evaluation sheets which are duplicated on five different colors of paper to cover all the types of assignments they complete. The students attach one of these to each assignment. The color identifies quickly what assignment we are to evaluate. These sheets list the objectives for each assignment. For



example, we give points for adequate development of paragraphs, logical ordering of ideas, well-developed topic sentences or thesis statement, transitions between sentences and paragraphs, and so on. On the back of the evaluation sheet is a checklist of grammatical constructions and page numbers in the study units which they may refer to. If they do not understand the written explanation well, we then explain it to them and, if necessary, give them exercises to help them learn the concept. We subtract points for awkward phrases, shift in point of view, and some grammatical problems, but they may earn them as rewrite points for revisions; and we subtract points, which they lose, for punctuation and spelling errors, in order to encourage careful proofreading. Although some instructors believe that close evaluation of this kind destroys the creative spirit, we have found that students build confidence in themselves when they know what is acceptable and what has to be changed. Our role is that of editors helping them prepare their manuscripts for their audiences and helping them revise and refine so that they finally produce a polished paper.

Students may get as much help as they need while working on the preliminary drafts of the paper. However, they have to decide when the paper is completed. After we evaluate it, they may revise it once. If they are not satisfied with the final grade, they may substitute another paper for it. We do not emphasize grades, but we use them as indicators of the quality of writing. If a student has extreme difficulty on the first two papers but then improves greatly, we do not average all his scores but give him a grade representing his final accomplishment.

## SELF-PACING

Another important strategy is self-pacing, allowing the students to work at their own speed so that they can master each unit before going on to the next. However, self-pacing is not without its problems. Some students take it as a signal to work only when they feel like it. Or they respond first to pressure in other classes. Naturally, this spells disaster.

We overcome this problem by preparing a number of calendars to show students when we expect them to reach specified goals and to hand in assignments. One calendar may schedule students to complete paragraph writing or six study units of sentence writing in nine weeks. Other choices are to complete nine units of sentence writing or the essay course in seventeen weeks. Each student chooses the calendar he

wants, and we try to help him stay on schedule. If we see, however, that he needs more time, we revise his schedule. If he allows himself to slip behind, we find out whether he has problems. If he has none, we urge him along by telling him that we are looking forward to reading his paragraph at the next class meeting or that it appears he is ready for a unit test. This individual attention is sometimes all the student needs to quicken his space.

## CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

Classes meet for six hours a week either two or three times a week. During the two- or three-hour period we instructors, assisted by one paid instructional assistant and two or three tutors earning college credit, move about among the students, working with individual students or small groups. Because the study units provide the "lecture," we seldom address the whole group after we have introduced the course on the first day. We do, however, have small discussion groups to answer questions or to talk about essays whenever the need arises, and we encourage the students to let others read what they have written so that they can get an audience reaction. During the class we help students understand the lessons and exercises, choose topics to write about, review our evaluation of papers, and revise paragraphs and essays, we also use this time to read and approve thesis statements and topic sentences, and indicate where students may find information about punctuation and grammar. In other words, we try to respond to each student's need as it comes about.

## OPEN ENTRY AND EXIT

Because we have several work schedules, students may enter or leave the courses at any time during the semester. It is no problem to get them started because we can administer the Writing Pretest at any time. Then we assign them appropriate materials, and they work at their own pace. Those who do not complete all the units register the next semester and begin where they left off.

## AWARDING UNITS OF CREDIT

My teaching partners and I initially divided the Language and Composition course into ten modules, each consisting of a varying number of study units. Our intention was to give students one unit of credit each time they completed a module. Our colleagues, however, felt that the paragraph writing and essay writing courses should remain three-unit courses. As a result, we give modular credit in only the sentence writing course. If students do not complete paragraph writing or essay writing by the end of the semester, we give them IP (In Progress), and they return the next semester to pick up where they had left off. The number of units a student may earn in one semester varies widely. The highly motivated ones earn two units for sentence writing and three units for paragraph writing in one semester, or three units for paragraph writing alone, or three units for paragraph writing and three units for essay writing. The students with poor writing backgrounds or full time jobs may complete only one or two modules in one semester.

## TUTORS

Although a good part of the strength of this mastery learning program lies in having sequential, comprehensive study units and unit tests available, another important part is having at least one instructor or tutor for every ten students. Most of our tutors are students who have completed one of our courses or who have come from high school qualified for essay writing. They register for a course called Teacher Aides in English; in one semester we have as many as 75 to 90 students enroll. They earn one unit of credit for each 54 hours they spend in class tutoring and one unit for meeting with the instructor in charge of the class approximately one hour a week during the semester. A few of our tutors are upper division and graduate students at California State University, Sacramento. They enroll in tutoring classes there and also earn units of credit for the time they spend in our classes.

To get an adequate number of tutors, we recruit from among the students we have in class. Those we ask are flattered to be considered capable of tutoring, but they sometimes wonder whether they can actually cope with the responsibility. Almost immediately they begin working even more seriously on their writing assignments so that they can become effective tutors.

Because tutoring is a learning experience, we do not expect our tutors to be experts. We are always available in the classroom to answer their questions. In addition, we ask them to read papers we have evaluated so that they can understand how we have determined the number of points the student receives. Then we ask them to grade two or three papers a week. As we make the final evaluation on these papers, we note what the tutors have written and then discuss the papers with them as well as with the students who wrote them.

## RECOGNIZING STUDENTS' INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

I decided in 1969 to individualize instruction in sentence writing because of the variety of writing problems the students in a single class had. Investigating the reasons why they had not had adequate preparation in the first twelve years of school, I learned that some had been in overcrowded classrooms where they did not get enough individual help, or where teachers could not possibly grade all the written work. Some of their teachers were not adequately trained to teach writing; others had been forced to teach English even though it was not their major. Many of the students had passed from one English course to the next with a grade of D. Some had learned English as a second language. Others had been transferred from one school to another because their parents had moved frequently. A large number read no books outside of school and had reading problems. One of the consequences was that the students characterized themselves as "dumb"; they were sure they could never hope to make more than a C in the class. I recognized that I had no alternative but to offer a very basic course in which students had time to master a single concept and apply it before they could go on to the next one. In addition, I felt I could help improve their self-concept by awarding a grade of B for an 85 percent score on unit tests.

I did not realize it at the time but Benjamin Bloom, J. D. Carroll, and others were writing in the 1960's about students' individual differences. Carroll, for example, said in 1965 that some students learn four times faster than others and pointed out that teachers who ignore these differences will have some students who cannot cope with the material and others who are bored.<sup>3</sup> Bloom in 1968 pointed out that "most students

<sup>3</sup>J. P. Carroll, "School Learning Over the Long Haul," *Learning and the Educational Process* (Skokie, Illinois: Rand McNally & Co., 1965).

(perhaps over 90 percent) can master what we have to teach them, and it is the task of instruction to find the means which will enable our students to master the subject under consideration."<sup>4</sup> My experience with the students in the sentence writing class supported Bloom's and Carroll's contentions.

In the years since I began my program, I have also recognized that the biggest problem in writing may be within the students themselves; some lack the maturity and self-discipline to write competently until they reach college and then may have writing problems the first year or two there. Margaret Mead would blame this lack of maturity on our society, which, unlike other cultures, keeps the majority living as children at least four to six years beyond puberty. This delay may hinder them in their early teens from thinking logically or solving problems; parents continue to make decisions for them. The concerns they have are narrowed to their own immediate worlds. Their writing, which Josephine Miles says is evidence of the students' ability to think,<sup>5</sup> reveals their inability to handle abstractions and to think logically. Sentence structure is immature; language is extremely informal, filled with current slang because they lack the vocabulary to express their ideas in Standard English. They reveal the narrow confines of their worlds when they write topic sentences, such as "Floating down the river in a raft is a fun sport" or "Swimming makes you healthy," or they stare into space because they cannot think of something to write about.

## HOW THEY LEARN TO WRITE

In working with the students the first few years, I became increasingly aware of the differences in learning rates and educational backgrounds. Some are very capable and highly motivated enough to complete writing assignments with a minimum of instruction. Because they have read widely most of their lives, they have good vocabularies and write mature sentences. Asking them to write informally about a topic or to prepare several pages of jotted notes presents no problem for them. They have ideas and willingly take a stand on issues. For

<sup>4</sup>Benjamin S. Bloom, "Learning for Mastery," *Evaluation Comment* (Center for the Study of Evaluation of Industrial Programs, University of California at Los Angeles) 1, No. 2 (May, 1968).

<sup>5</sup>Josephine Miles, "What We Already Know About Composition and What We Need to Know," *California English*, (September 1975), 14.

them free writing is easy and enjoyable. What they usually have to learn is to organize their ideas into paragraphs and essays by learning appropriate patterns and to refine their writing style. The study units I developed give them these patterns, and with a little practice and guidance as they write and rewrite, they become very adept writers.

Generalizing about the reluctant writers, however, is almost impossible because they vary greatly in learning abilities, educational background, and reasons for lack of motivation. As a result, a guided approach to writing seems best for them. Not only do they have to learn to comprehend concepts, but they also have to apply what they learn to their own writing, steps that Benjamin Bloom has detailed in his *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.<sup>6</sup> We also then have a fairly concrete means to evaluate them and to praise them for their accomplishments. The students have to be made to feel that their ideas and their ways of expressing them are worthwhile, and they have to learn that we are their allies. If we let them write without guidance and support, we might liken ourselves to an irresponsible physician who would send a patient to a pharmacy to choose whatever medicine he wishes from the shelves; the problem is that some medicines might not help him at all, and others might kill him.

Although some teachers I talk with believe this guided approach is too highly structured and inhibits creativity, I have found that it actually is liberating because it helps a student develop a sense of judgment about his writing. For example, one student, smiling broadly, asked me to read a paragraph for her fifth assignment in a ten-week period. My immediate reaction was that it was excellent, and I told her so. She said, "I knew you would say that. I really know how to write!" Then she talked about how awkward and self-conscious she had felt when she had first come into the class. She wrote very informally—a string of ideas expressed in casual language, separated occasionally by dashes. Now she knew how to select a topic, relate supporting ideas to it, maintain a consistent point of view, and use transitions. Though she did not realize it, her experience was not unique. It is repeated dozens of times each semester, but for each student it is very special.

As students learn the difference between general and specific ideas, they begin to think logically because they begin to see the relationship of ideas to one another. When they begin to understand the patterns of language and the relationship of ideas in sentences, para-

<sup>6</sup>Benjamin S. Bloom *et al*, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay, 1956).

graphs, and essays, writing no longer seems to be a mystery, and they notice that they can more easily understand what they read. As a result, they read more and then increase the number of topics they want to write about. While writing and rewriting, they recognize that they are developing a fluency with language and gaining control as they become well-acquainted with organizational patterns that work. Even a large number of the students who feel extremely inadequate at first gradually gain self-confidence as they experience a continuing series of little successes.

## IMPEDIMENTS TO GOOD WRITING

Although most of the students gradually learn to write, not all of them move through the course smoothly and steadily. For example, they may learn how to generate a topic sentence and then build a paragraph to support it, but their sentences may be poorly written, with as many problems as the long list of correction symbols indicates are possible—grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary. Sentences vary in length; however, the short ones are frequently fragments, and the long ones sometimes are a hopeless tangle because the students do not understand the meanings of the connectors like *consequently* and *although*, because they subordinate the wrong part of the sentence or link two ideas that are not related, or because they do not know how to eliminate unnecessary words. Some are discontented with their writing style. They feel clumsy and want to know how they can write like a professional. Others cannot see what their problems are. Even when they read one of their involved sentences aloud, it makes sense to them, and they are able to explain what it means, but they are not able to see why the sentence is faulty or illogical. Their paragraphs may begin with an acceptable topic sentence followed by a related supporting idea, but the remainder may consist of a number of generalizations, information they think is important but which they cannot relate to their main idea. If they attempt essays, they have the same kinds of problems—only more of them. However, if they are motivated to learn, they frequently can improve their writing greatly in a semester or two.

Some who should succeed drop the course for a variety of reasons. They may find writing, especially essay writing, “too much work.” They may work 40 hours a week and try to carry 15 units of college work

besides. Or they may enroll in 17 to 20 units instead of the usual 12 to 15 units, then find they cannot complete all the homework. They may not be able to see the immediate application of the writing techniques to the courses they are taking. They may be determined to stay with paragraph writing or essay writing even though their diagnostic test scores and their written work indicate they need introductory work, then give up suddenly when they cannot complete the assignments. They frequently enroll in college classes only until they find a job. Although we lose people like these during a given semester, a number come back the next semester or a year later, saying they know what they want, and then they work energetically.

Some who enter have had no writing experience at all in previous schooling, or they have had bad experiences with writing assignments. For example, one man in his early twenties who was having trouble writing his first essay resisted accepting help for a few weeks, then finally began asking questions. The only papers he had previously written were assigned to punish him. As he struggled to write his paper, I suggested that he might be able to get information by going to the library to read articles; however, he appeared very reluctant to go even though he had attended the orientation our librarians give for writing students. When I asked whether he would like me to go with him, he nodded yes immediately. Fortunately we were able to find a number of useful sources. He worked energetically another week, disappeared for three weeks, then came in to tell me he had found a job but that he would be back some time.

A second young man, whose first paper was a series of generalizations even though he had used some source material, determined to produce a really good paper the next time. He came in with several pages of handwritten notes and asked for help in organizing them because he had never used notes before to write a paper. He marveled at the amount of information he was able to gather. After three or four class meetings in which he got help each time, he produced a well written, well-organized, informative paper, and he was thrilled with the experience.

## THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Although our program may appear at first glance to be restrictive because it is structured, it actually is flexible enough to meet the needs



of each student. The carefully developed structure is a comfortable framework that helps us maintain our perspective even though every one of our students may be working on a different assignment, and it also allows us to make any changes that are necessary as the semester progresses. Even though some of my material has been published, I recognize that a text is limited in its scope and that I will have students from time to time who will need something besides what the book offers. Because we stay flexible, adapting constantly to the needs of the students, we are able to maintain a relaxed atmosphere where students, tutors, and instructors form a complementary triangle.

## TEACHING THE THINKING PROCESS IN ESSAY WRITING

City College has a three-semester Basic Writing sequence designed to assist college students whose placement tests indicate a deficiency in writing. I've taught them all: English 1 is concerned with the development of the sentence and paragraph; English 2, with the expository essay; English 3, with the long paper. They are not popular courses. As motivated and as intellectually able as they may be, students placed in Basic Writing courses are generally non-liberal arts majors who consider the process of writing as mysterious as a foreign language, and less relevant to their academic or professional goals. These students cannot write, quite simply, because they have not been taught to write, as they have not been taught many other skills one expects them to have after twelve years of elementary and secondary schooling. Unfortunately, Basic Writing students tend to blame themselves for their deficiencies. Many are deeply ashamed to be in a remedial class and have little hope that another English course of any kind will help them.

It took me many years to understand the complex needs of students who are placed in Basic Writing and to begin to develop effective ways to meet those needs. Of all the techniques I have tried, there are three that have been productive on all levels of the Basic Writing sequence:

1. Constant writing on topics that require emotional involvement. I encourage emotional involvement, not out of soft-hearted sentimentality, but for the practical pedagogical reason that feeling assists cognition. If students allow their feeling about an experience to flow to their intellect, the feeling will heighten awareness of that experience, stimulate thought and, it is hoped, motivate communication of that thought.

2. One-to-one conferences to give students feedback on their progress and to assist them with special problems, such as grammar. To help me in this task, I have always used tutoring facilities available at City College. Most recently, I have asked the assistance of students in a

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*Ann Petrie is a writer who has been teaching at City College, City University of New York, since 1969.*

graduate pedagogy program whom I train to tutor and grade papers and to team-teach with me in the classroom.

3. A variety of in-class exercises that require active student participation. Because of the negative experience they have had in past English classes, most Basic Writing students attempt to sit back passively and take in what they can with a minimum of self-exposure. Of the various exercises I use to break through this passivity, the most effective is peer-group discussions.

In addition to these basic techniques, I have found each Basic Writing course requires an overall dynamic, as integrated and developmental as the sequence itself, to advance its students from the achievement of the goals of one level to those of the next. I believe the most crucial course is English 2, which teaches the essay, for if students do not master the analytical thinking process that is essential to the essay form, they will never be able to write the long papers necessary for college-level work.

In the years I taught English 1, I was always disappointed at the end of the semester when I assigned an essay to prepare my students for English 2, to discover that many who had improved the most in narrative and descriptive writing had great difficulty with the essay form. Organization was poor, flow constricted, arguments weak. When I tried to analyze the cause, the primary problem almost always seemed to derive from a weak thesis. Slowly I realized that the students had never been taught that there was an analytical process they had to go through before they could develop a strong thesis. I tried to describe this process as simply and as clearly as I could, as a weaving together of many sources of information on a given subject into a general idea—a thesis—which could be expanded and defended by the very particulars from which the thesis derived. I explained further that I would call the process "thinking analytically." But my English 1 students found it difficult to comprehend what I was saying, even when I used examples. So, when I was assigned my first English 2 course, I decided to demonstrate the process by organizing all classroom activities—rough draft or journal writing, analysis of reading, class discussions—in a way which would replicate the process of analytical thinking, or the ideal work students should do before writing an essay.

As a further guide, I insisted every essay be built on the following four-paragraph model outline, which requires that students gather more than obvious information on the essay topic, come to a conclusion in thesis form, and defend that thesis with at least two logical arguments.

### INTRODUCTION

Names subject. Gives some background information.

### THESIS

Names writer's opinion on subject in a way that requires defense.

### TRANSITION

Clarifies relationship of material about to be presented with that which precedes it.

### REASON #1

Defends the thesis by arguments appropriate to the subject such as specific example, description, personal observation, reference to facts, statistics, opinions of others.

### TRANSITION

### REASON #2

TRANSITION
CONCLUSION
Links thesis with some additional insight.

In spite of the discipline imposed by the model, my students respond to it positively. In addition to giving them a clear guide for the construction of an essay, it provides constancy at the center of a course in which themes and activities not only change from week to week, but become increasingly difficult.

In each 15-week semester I assign an average of fifteen essays and teach at least five essay forms: personal, proposal, critical, contrast/comparison, evaluation. Of these, I spend the most time, four to five weeks, on the personal essay which is, for my students, the most difficult. To help them, I begin slowly so they can experience mastery of each step before moving on. And I use myself as a model.

Work on the first essay, NAMING YOUR NAME, begins in the first class. After the necessary formalities, I talk about my name and my feelings about it in a conversational, unorganized way. Then I ask the students to write informally about their names. This "journal" writing, which is always the first step in preparation for an essay, gives the students the freedom to record their immediate thoughts and feelings.

In class #2, I distribute the geometric drawing of the model outline, explain its principle, and distribute an essay I have written on my name following the outline. The students have heard my "rough draft" material. I explain that by using the outline as a guide, I was able to edit out the unimportant details, focus on material that supported the thesis and expand that material to 500 words by using a combination of personal experiences, anecdotes, and concrete facts. I then return the journals the students wrote in class #1 and ask them to write an outline for their essay based on the model. If they have difficulty now or at anytime during group work throughout the semester, I encourage them to call on me or the student teachers for assistance.

In class #3, I divide the students into two "primary" groups, each directed by a student teacher. From this point on, the class meets and

conducts most of its business in these primary groups. After the groups have been formed, the students read their NAMING THEIR NAMES essays out loud. Then the student teachers, who have also read their essays aloud, ask each student to give the names of the other group members. The students discover that the stronger the essay, the more likely the students are to remember the name. This exercise is the first real moment of total involvement. For most it is one of shared agony and provides excellent material for the second essay assignment, NAME YOUR FEELING ABOUT READING OUT LOUD IN CLASS. To the surprise of many who expect to arrive at a negative thesis, they discover there were good as well as unpleasant points to the exercise, if only that nine or ten people learned their names.

In Class #4, I distribute familiar forms of communication such as print ads, storyboards for TV commercials, and cartoons. I explain that as simple as these forms are, each has, at its center, a concept. I ask students to find the concept or thesis and write it down. Then I divide the primary groups into sub-groups of three or four students which, under the direction of an appointed leader, attempt to come to an agreement on the theses. Later the class meets in a large circle which I call a super-group. Each of the group leaders report on the group theses and there is an open discussion. I have found that the competitive pride that develops in anticipation of the super-group sessions helps stimulate more involvement in the sub- and primary-group discussions. This involvement can generate exciting class discussions, particularly as students begin to explore ideas that are related to, but larger than, original themes.

In subsequent classes, I distribute reading materials that become more challenging, more literary, and I make the further demand that students find and write down not only the author's thesis but his reasons and their own response to the work. I integrate reading into the class work in the same way: sub- or primary-group discussion; reports to the super group that lead to larger discussions. This analysis of literary models help strengthen the process of critical thinking, but there is a further benefit that may be more important: each student can be engaged in the class on some level at all times. The more skilled or verbal can assume leader roles and assist the weaker. The students find the groups, especially the smaller, unthreatening. Each student can speak without being judged or humiliated because he or she doesn't understand, or because of a difference in point of view. In fact, the greater the differences expressed, the more interesting the subject becomes. Working this way increases confidence in self-expression,

which is in turn reflected in the writing. Theses, in particular, begin to get stronger.

If the class needs an example, I write a model of the third essay, NAMING YOUR PLACE. I also begin to type up the best or most interesting of the weekly essays each week so the class can see the diversity of point of view that is possible. The student models serve as well to reinforce some aspect of the model outline, such as how to strengthen introductions, transitions, or arguments. Students react to this "publication" of their essays with a pride that stimulates better work. By the fourth week, I find that students who claimed in the beginning they had nothing to say are not only writing at length but demonstrating sufficient mastery of the process of analytical thinking to begin to tackle more complex subjects, more demanding forms.

By the fourth week, most students have mastered the model outline and are using the classroom activities more or less naturally to help prepare for the final drafts of their essays. Those who have not mastered the outline, because they can't or won't do the work, drop—an average of four out of a class of twenty-two. Those who stay are ready to work intensively on a single theme for a sustained period of time as well as to try types of essays other than the personal. I chose "higher education" for the theme of this section because it is broad enough to be dealt with from both a personal and an objective point of view, thus providing a good transition from the personal to the proposal and critical essays. It is also a dramatic way to show students that a topic they consider boring (what student ever wanted to write about education?) can be brought to life.

Because of the financial crises at the City University this past semester, I spent an unusually long four weeks on the theme of higher education. The main work consisted of three essays: NAMING YOUR WORK—a personal essay about the students' feelings about being at City College; NAMING THE ALTERNATIVE YOU THINK WOULD BE BEST TO SOLVE THE FINANCIAL CRISES AT CUNY—a proposal essay; NAMING YOUR OPINION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT EVERYONE SHOULD GO TO COLLEGE—a critical essay. Predictably, in their first journals, "Why I Came To City College," most students wrote that they came to college to find a better, higher paying job after graduation. As is often the case, their refusal to think more deeply derived from a resistance to confronting negative feelings. From past experience, I know Basic Writing students are often angry at not having been given the preparation and encouragement they needed for college. They feel a sense of shame that they are

in a remedial class and suspect secretly they are not as good as the "regular" students.

We began to tap these negative feelings through the reading and discussion of the February 20, 1976, *New York Times* editorial by Kenneth Keniston, titled "For Him There Is No Exit from the Cellar." Keniston's thesis is that one quarter of American students are programmed to fail. He argues that these students receive inadequate health care and education; they have been psychologically damaged; they are victims of prejudice and an unfair economic system. When a number of my students corroborated Keniston's thesis by relating personal experiences, there was an emotional release in the class that not only shattered the defensive shell of boredom but expanded the discussion to include the ways in which discrimination in education could be eliminated. The class concluded that the answer was through education itself, and with this realization the students began to take a genuine interest in the subject of "higher education." They were particularly attentive to the story of City College as my team teachers and I traced the college's evolution from its creation in 1847 as a free academy for the children of the poor, through its growth into a "proletarian Harvard," to the advent of open admissions in 1970. As a consequence, the first set of essays, NAMING YOUR WORK, were considerably more spirited and thoughtful than the rough draft journals. Students began to write about college as a means of developing one's fullest potential or, as one student put it, "a break in the long chain of failure that has been the tradition of my family."

Once the class had an understanding of the prestigious history of City College, there was a new sense of urgency when we discussed proposals being made to resolve the issues raised by its financial crisis, such as charging tuition, raising admissions standards, cutting back on faculty and facilities. When they wrote their essays on the crisis, it was no mere academic exercise but a real effort to find alternatives to enable them to continue what was likely to be their only chance for a quality higher education. Not one student, as it turned out, would have been in that English 2 class if it were not for open admissions and free tuition.

Most of the students were highly conscious of their improvement throughout the section on higher education. In addition to the value of the reading, discussions, and writing, they had begun to grasp the step-by-step process that enlarged their initial concept of college as a place for job training into something much broader and more important to their total lives. The pleasure they experienced arose from more than the achievement of improvement; they realized they were



learning to apply the steps that caused that achievement, the process of analytical thinking, to different contents. As their sense of security in the practice of analytical thinking increased, they became more and more motivated to confront topics as challenging as "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethnic Identification," "How to Maintain One's Identity as a Man or Woman without Conforming to Conventional Sex Roles," and "The Nature of Work."

Each semester, one of the measures of the degree of the students' motivation is that midway through the course the students are receptive to five or six lessons in grammar. I wait until mid-semester to take up grammar so that we have a clear diagnosis of the major common problems. By this time, students tend to participate not because they have to but because they want to learn how to strengthen their writing. They are even enthusiastic about correcting grammar tests in peer groups. In fact, the vitality of the class toward the end of the semester, as many observers have remarked, is barely manageable and would not be manageable at all if it were not for the students' determination to continue the success they began to experience in those first group discussions, in which everyone had to participate, if only by being called by name for an opinion.

Success, no matter how small, does breed success. Of the eighteen or so students who stay in my English 2 class for the entire semester, there is rarely a failure. Many are able to skip English 3 and take the Proficiency Exam that completes the Basic Writing sequence. And when students collect their thick files of writing at the end of the semester, they do so with a sense of pride that contrasts dramatically with their passivity at the beginning. A few announce that they like writing so much they intend to change their majors to English. I don't know how many do. But I am certain the process of writing is less of a mystery to them and that many feel much closer to being "regular" college students. For young men and women who have been tracked for most of their education to achieve modestly, this has a special value.

## COACHING WRITING

My writing class consists of interviewing, coaching and directing students to write well. As an experienced stage director and speech teacher, I train the students in physical and vocal performance techniques so their writing is effectively presented in the classroom. Like a director of an improvisatory group, I advise students on how to place and organize words to make them work effectively. This article consists of a listing of the types of advice I give students and examples of students developing their skills.

Students physically act out and verbally describe people they would like to be or not like to be and visits to places they would like or wouldn't like to visit. The focus of the class is on how to describe being a body and looking out from a body. We focus on the relationship between a word and a sight, with an emphasis on the difference between the student and the sight involved, i.e. what would you have to change to become that other person or thing. A change of person would involve changes in body, clothing, position, and environment, since you always are a person in an environment. When looking at a person, the eye takes in a person clothed and surrounded in a space, with things and space and people before it and behind it and around it and above it and below it. When the teacher uses this technical guidance as a way of coaching and directing a student's visual and verbal performance, the students realize the value and truth of the teacher's instruction because it leads directly to successful student performances and accomplishments that the other students directly respond to and so participate in the success of.

The technical advice I give students, in interview or dictation, includes: pick places that illustrate the values you place on or recognize in your life; compare good experiences with bad experiences; find what makes the person or place you describe different than any other

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person or place in the world; place people at the points that describe most amply the persons and places you are describing: when you see something or someone, write about it completely at that moment, so the moment happens to the reader as much as it would have happened to the reader if he had been there; pick out and look over objects and places that are as unique as possible to the experiences you are describing, and eliminate objects that do not contribute a unique and original experience to the reader's life; keep in mind that sights and passages through spaces are essential forms of human experience, based on the eye and the human body's ability to walk through the world; remember, too, that the eye either watches someone or something doing something or other, or looks around in space; see that actions continue in the same space, each event responding to another, so that a human event grows around the place where the reader is placed; place the reader into the experience you are writing about so that the reader can share the values the writer has discovered in living his life.

Sometimes I interview students, helping them find unique and original material based on where they spend their lives; sometimes I dictate papers on creating and moving the human body through unique spaces; sometimes we make up stories together, each person contributing objects, characters and events. Students are taught to create strategically viable spaces and fill them in, so the reader feels each eye movement he makes leads to a striking sight or experience, something only a wise life or a good writer or artist or society provides.

Students are guided against words that express values that the reader can't share because the writer has written no experiences that would create these values in the reader, words that quickly mention places and events without creating and contributing unique forms or aspects to the mentioned experiences, words that just label and mention experiences, causing the eyeball and body to be running all over in time and space, without these changes in orientation leading to unique experiences. The following is an example of a student with reasonable grammar capabilities growing in writing technique under this method of instruction.

### TRINIDAD BEACHES 1

By Pearl Orakwue

If you want lots of sunshine, sandy beaches and friendly people who go out of their way to be helpful, Trinidad is the place for a vacation. This is

where my family and I spent our vacation this year and we enjoyed it immensely.

The flight from New York was smooth and comfortable. On the way I kept imagining what the place would be like. I had read and heard so much about it from my friend who had visited there before.

The plane landed at Port-of-Spain the capital in the late afternoon and the place was everything that I had imagined. The sky was pale blue, I could just see traces of the bright orange sun sinking behind a white cloud. There was a balmy breeze blowing and it felt so good to inhale the fresh clean air.

We were driven to our hotel by a taxi driver who pointed out some of the important places such as the Queens Park Savannah, which is equivalent to our Shea or Yankee Stadium, only soccer and cricket are played there rather than baseball. He also gave us a quick rundown on the history of Trinidad some of which we already knew.

Trinidad is an oblong shaped island lying on the North East coast of Venezuela, SA. in the Caribbean Sea. It has an area of 1864 square miles. Its population is a little over one million, of which a little more than half are of African descent. The rest are mainly East Indians with a sprinkling of Chinese. Columbus discovered it for Spain in 1492 but the English later conquered it. It gained its independence in 1962. English is the main language although in the country districts Spanish is still spoken by the elderly people.

For the rest of our stay, what impressed me most were the beaches. Everything was so natural and peaceful—the golden sand warmed by the sun through your toes as you walked on the beach, the tall coconut palms swaying in the breeze, and the water was so clear and clean you could see your feet when you stood in it.

We also took in some night spots and it was a wonderful change dancing to the beat of the calypso. This vacation was one of the best I ever spent.

In a bad paper, spaces are used up quickly; the eye is always jumping, and so is the body, back and forth, without experiencing anything everywhere; "we also took in some night spots. . . ." is a typical example—in order to do so, you would have to enter and exit many times, not to mention taking cabs all around town (I would mime this in class to show why this paper doesn't work), and yet the writer, having forced the reader to consider all this movement in time and space, doesn't give the reader any experience of being in any special club; in bad writing, the writer is forced to mention new things all the time because everytime the writer mentions a thing, not knowing what to do with it, she is forced to go on to something else. Experiences are mentioned that don't in any way add to the reader's experience, as for

example: "we were driven to our hotel by a taxi driver who pointed out some of the important places. . . ."—this is what I call useless traveling, since the reader has no idea what the hotel is like, what the cab driver is like, or what most of the important places are; the student constantly creates spaces that are impossible to experience, such as, ". . . the place was everything I had imagined (that's called leaving the reader to his own imagination, or not writing). . . . on the way I kept imagining what the place would be like. . . . For the rest of our stay. . . . everything was so natural and peaceful. . . ."

In general, if a student can't begin to create a space within three eye movements, the paper is lost. It would be as if I were to say to you, look behind you, and you turned around, and there was nothing there; and I said, come here with me, look at this, and there was nothing; and I said look over there, and there was nothing there either. By that time, as in a student paper, you would realize I was wasting and misusing your attention. There is almost nothing in the description that is specific to Trinidad—after all, New York occasionally has pale blue sky, traces of bright orange sun sinking behind a white cloud, and even, occasionally, fresh clean air. A coconut tree is probably more common to Trinidad than New York City, but even here, if you've never seen one, then her mentioning one won't do the student any good in communicating an experience to you, since you won't know what to imagine when the student mentions the word in her paper.

Technically, mentioning "Port-of-Spain the capital" is a big mistake, and I would make a big deal about this in class. The student has no intention of writing anything about the capital particularly, and so she is carelessly opening a huge space in two words that she has no intention of using for the whole paper. "Sandy beaches" is a big mistake—if you use that phrase, you might cut to several beach scenes immediately.

The worst part of the paper, of course, is called "cut to a reference book," and, sadly, is the only type of writing many students know how to do. The reference book has nothing, really, to do with what the student wants to write about or knows about, and is certainly not written in the style of a taxi cab driver. Taxi cab drivers can usually at least try to think of something interesting to say. I hope the typical Trinidad taxi cab driver hasn't sunk this low. Also, since paraphrase of any sort is a borrowing of some of the form of the work you are referring to, it undermines the challenge and possibility of your learning how to write as a personal skill. Reference books do have a useful structure, but knowing when and how you want to use them is an important matter.

In a second version of this paper, the student found something to look at: coconut trees. This was a great achievement, and was used as paragraph two in her third version of this paper.

In her second version, the student made a big mistake by writing "we arrived in the late afternoon. . . ." and then by going back to New York on her fifth sentence, and by writing "it seemed like paradise" at a moment when she had not even begun to create a place for the reader: "We arrived in the late afternoon and the place was everything that I had imagined. It seemed like paradise after the hot muggy city I had just left. . . ." The reader both doesn't know what paradise looks like and doesn't know what Trinidad looks like. It is like describing something as beautiful, something the writer has every right to feel, since the writer has been there, but which the reader has no ability to feel, since the reader has no idea what the place is like.

The student attempted this third version later in the semester.

### TRINIDAD BEACHES 3

by Pearl Orakwue

I thoroughly enjoyed my vacation in Trinidad last summer, a rewarding and fulfilling experience that made me feel very close to nature. There was a slight trace of the orange sun sinking behind some clouds when I arrived. The balmy breeze whispering at my skirt gave me the feeling that the sea was not too far away.

On my way to the beach the following morning, I could not help noticing the miles and miles of coconut palms that grew on the grey sandy soil that lined the roadway. They were all approximately 100 feet tall, with slender trunks and light brown barks. There were notches about one inch wide around the circumference of the barks at distances of every eighteen inches all the way to the top of the trees, where the wide spread branches were located. These ringed notches were helpful in climbing the trees during harvest time. The bunches of green fruits, each about the size of a football and each bunch consisting of about eighteen fruits, were located at the very top of the trunk, resting between the branches. From a distance, the grove of trees looked like a group of dancing ladies, with their slim, graceful trunks and long overlapping skirtlike branches swaying in the breezes.

Las Quevas, the beach I visited, was the most beautiful I have ever seen. To feel the sparkling grey sand, warmed by the noonday sun, slipping through my toes like tiny pearls as I walked barefooted on the beach was quite an experience. I walked for more than a mile and did not cover the

entire beach. There were little thatched roofed shelters opened on all sides for people who preferred to stay out of the sun, and scattered between the shelters were a few coconut palms. The water was a clear blue, very warm and tranquil. When I stood up to my shoulders in it, I could see my feet among the clean white pebbles at the bottom. The entire scene reminded me of a picturesque postcard. Someday I would like to return there to explore more of the island's beauties.

The writer is now writing decently. This is a clear four-location paper. You experience the moment of arriving, and even have a skirt on at the moment—in other words, the writer is immediately building you into her experience, and building an experience around your/her body. “On the way to the beach. . . .” is well chosen location, giving the reader something unique to see, and the writer creates a full sight there. She later chooses a particular beach, tells you what it feels like to walk along it, gives you a glance at the shore, turns your eyes to the water (clear blue), moves your body into the water (very warm), and gives you a human reaction to the water now that you are in it (tranquil). You know exactly how your eyes, shoulders and feet are related to the water, the bottom of the water, and the pebbles, and what the pebbles look like. You are built into the experience, which identifies your mind with the writer's mind, and you think something that you might not have thought of by yourself. Since the experience of Trinidad is, from the writer's point of view, the experience of going to the beach, the writer withdraws you at this climactic point, having led you from the moment of arrival to the moment of submersion.

Technically, there are two minor leaks, meaning places where the writer touches on experiences that the reader is not given an opportunity to experience (“did not cover the entire beach” and “to explore more of the island's beauties”), but these are quite minor. Minor points, however, are what usually make or break writers. I don't think there is any need for the student to work on this experience any further. I only point these out to a student to increase sensitivity in the student to knowing exactly what her words are doing for or against her at any given moment. I was not aware during the class that the student had regularly returned to this particular self-chosen paper, and was very grateful to her for presenting me with this modest but attractive model of her growth.

Grades are : xcbaXCBADE. A small x is a small paper of no technical competence; a large X is a large paper of no technical competence. Any x grade increases your average by adding to your other grades, but x's

themselves amount to nothing. When this class is working well, students grow slowly and surely through the semester up the grade scale, a balance of quantitative and qualitative considerations. D's and F's are serious warnings and serious statements to the student, only given after a student has had a chance to develop from an assumed and non-penalized original non-competence. (In a course where the student is expected to work in such an original, direct and public manner, no cheating can be allowed. Formally, any cheating flunks the paper and the course. However, students may be given one second chance, but never the same grade they would have achieved otherwise. Students will never expose their difficulties and incompetencies as much as this course demands unless they know that they are not expected to be writers until the teacher has taught them how, and that all the successes of fellow students in the class are live achievements, not library imitations.)

Student progress in this class is based on students' growing respect for each other's achievements, and the discovery that each could do so well. Students' papers are read in class; papers that earn enormous respect are analyzed for their technical skills; papers that are good or bad are acted out or directed to show how they use or waste and fail to use the attention of the reader as a viewer of a human situation.

Grammar is graded numerically, and a careful record is kept of all types of student mistakes. Exercises are done verbally on primary dynamic problems, like the period, comma, word reference, and word usage. My grammar exercises are based on reducing and expanding positive and negative grammatical structures, in other words, correct and erroneous usage, over the class, using its imagination, and then having the students continue this work on their own papers until grammar is mastered.

Reduction means making something unbelievably simple. Expansion means making it awesomely grand. Standard important forms, always varying with the class, include the following:

Phrases before the subject, involving long ones, followed by a comma:

On the very day that a young man I met on my vacation at Spring Lake decided he would write me a long-overdue letter, I . . .

Short phrases involving many separations by commas:

Last Thursday, just after midnight, high above Mount McKinley, where I was walking my dog, Dover, whom you all know, I saw. . . .

Phrases between the subject and the verb, which have commas before and after them:

Jack, the man wearing that green hat, is. . . .



Differentiation of the above from the long subject:

The man wearing that green hat is. . . .

Explications of explications that are part of the same sentence:

I met that man from Vienna, a wonderful city in Austria, a country in Europe, a continent I have visited more than I have visited Asia, a land mass that borders the Pacific Ocean, where I once fished with my father, an old man who once taught me tennis, a sport I enjoy more than the sport of grammar, which I enjoy as much as making love, cutting classes and drinking beer. He said to say hello to you.

The usage of words that define the meanings of previous words with incomplete meanings:

This is the bridge that was built by the same man who built the bridge that we could see from the bridge that we were standing on at about this time last year.

It is important at times to go to the infinite with each example. Stopping short doesn't make an impression. I have seen students stare at an example on the board as if it were one of the ten wonders of the world, and actually gather around it, as if it were a mutation or an accident, in awe. Exercises can be based on doing things right or wrong, so that the student develops an intense and clear feeling when either is happening in one of his papers.

Imagine, now, one of these exercises being done by a group of students. There are twenty-five in the class. After each student has added one phrase at a time, 496 phrases have been added to a sentence without (that's the exercise) anyone (Oh, horror!) accidentally starting a new sentence, and all that pressure, worse than in the last game of the World Series, is on the poor student facing the task of adding phrase 497!

Naturally, all the work of making up the actual sentences should be the students', working in sequences with each other. Students are free to change the mood and direction of the content at will, making it suddenly sad, funny, sensible or outrageous. Students may express anything they feel or don't feel in these exercises, change directions in any way, and any student who finds a good way to undermine, develop, or expand the exercise is rewarded with the admiration and appreciation he earns. Given the proper encouragement, students can do astoundingly creative things in these exercises, creating remarkably poetic and moving maneuvers, and the opportunities for power and effect are so great that anti-academic students often join in with great and successful social and academic results.

After the class has begun to improve its grammar and increase the

size of its experiential writing papers, the instructor is free to move on to more abstract forms of writing: specialized writing, which limits attention to certain types of entities and eliminates all other forms of attention; technical writing, which is intended to give such a complete picture of a process that any person can both visualize and really accomplish the process; intellectual writing, exploring the world to decide which of all possible values and ideas are applicable and productive, and which of all possible ideas and values are inapplicable and counterproductive; and writing about writing, where the writer is reorganizing and presenting material that he has found in books and other written material.

Students in the class can progress from an inability to write at all to talented and moving confidence. One student began unable to write even competent sentence fragments, and these only under the pressure of the class. Here are the only three sentences his first paper consisted of and four sentences in class work written by him about the moon.

The brilliant, admirable, sophisticate, tedious,  
A lovely mother with admirable patience, sweet harth, and unforgettable  
dedication

Because was snowing, and the steam was not working, and the window  
was broken I got could

It look as a while ball hanging

I wonder how the man been walking there

It gives a lighth to us during the night

It is to far away

A few weeks later, the student was writing long, complex papers and beginning to master the language:

... As my Father and I got to Puerto Barrias, harbor, Lacated, in the North Atlantic zone of Guatemala, C.A., we got a small 20 Ft. Long Motor Boat the Port-Authority. ... We continued, and, after three hours we got the mouth of the saston River. The River, Look Like the one in the jungle, crowded with green shrub on the sides. It is about 100 yards wide, and the current was slow. Three canoes were Fishing around, and one of them, was crowded with many turtles of different sizes, up to about 3 foot in diameter. On one side, we contemplate a variety of birds species, and animals. One is the "Iguana": they rested on the branch or the trees, and seemed to be caching the sun rays. Those reptils, were of about 5 feet, and look Like small alagators. We also saw sneaks hanging on the trees. One of the big one was the Masacuata of about 20 feet long, and 8 inches diameter. ...

A few weeks later, his mastery of the language began to improve. He is still having problems with spelling, and he is starting to write with long subjects, which he is punctuating incorrectly. He is writing about being in the ROTC.

... One of the most important facts that I have to do as a cadet student, is to wear the uniform correctly. Shoes and brass should always be shined and in good repair. No items of military uniform should be worn mixed in with civilian clothes. This include the military field jacket, with or without distinctive insignia. When outdoors, the cap should be worn centered on the head with the welt approximately parrallel to the ground (not pushed to the back of the head). The outer coat, whether the uniform blouse or the overcoat, most be completely buttoned when worn. Hands has to be keep out of the trousers or overcoat pockets and the cadet in uniform should be alert to return the hand salute when the situation warrants. When in uniform the cadet is expected to present a well gloomed military apperance. Hair has to be neat and well trimmed face clean shaven, mustache trimmed buttons fastened and tie straight. The manner in which cadets should have worn their uniform, has been an indication and state of their training, dicipline, morale, pride, and self respect.

He has come a long way in a short time.

Non-writing is a technique of writing just as much as being able to write is a technique of writing. The non-writer points to experiences without creating them out of words; the non-writer is forced by his uncontrolled words to refer to and pass through enormous amounts of worldly material and ends up without expanding the reader's life experience at all because of his inability to use words to create individual and informative human experiences. Unlike the non-writer, the person who can write selects and creates unique experiences that the writer is able to use to expand the reader's participation and orientation in the world. In my class, the skills of creating experiences for the reader and of selecting subject matter for the reader are basic to the craft of writing.

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