

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

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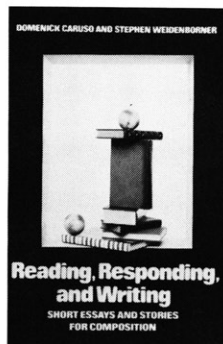
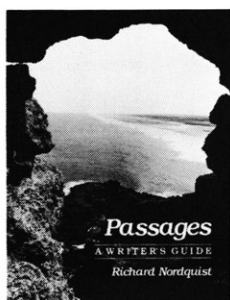
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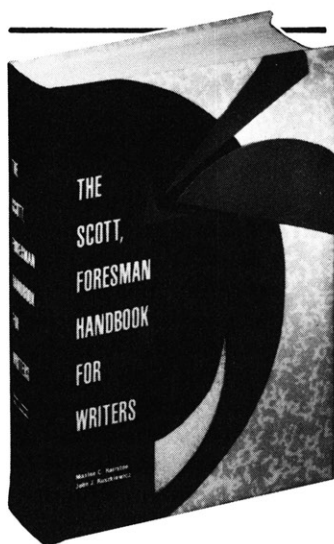
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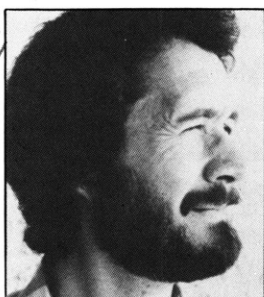
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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted. Authors need not limit themselves to topics previously announced because *JBW* issues will no longer be devoted to single topics.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require four copies of a manuscript. To assure impartial review, give author information and a biographical note for publication on the cover page only. One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. We require the new MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 1984). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our one-page style sheet.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on BW and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about matters such as the social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; rhetoric; discourse theory; cognitive theory; grammar; linguistics, including text analysis, error descriptions, and cohesion studies; English as a second language; and assessment and evaluation. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening; cross-disciplinary insights for basic writing from psychology, sociology, anthropology, journalism, biology, or art; the uses and misuses of technology for basic writing; and the like.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy; and teaching logs which trace the development of original insights.

Starting with the 1986 issues, a "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" will be given to the author of the best *JBW* article every four issues (two years). The prize is \$500.00, courtesy of an anonymous donor. The winner, to be selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, will be announced in our pages and elsewhere.

EDITOR'S COLUMN

With this issue, *JBW* completes two years under our new policies. Most notable among these policies is our conversion to a refereed journal. Without the invaluable services of our Editorial Board, and the goodwill of our authors who are willing to submit to our rigorous review process, we could not have succeeded as we have. This issue also marks the close of the two-year period stipulated for the first "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" for the best article in *JBW* every two years beginning in 1986. We hope to announce the winner, to be selected by a group of three scholar/teachers who do not serve on the *JBW* Editorial Board, in our next issue.

Another policy in place since 1986 has been our move away from the constraints of thematic issues in favor of offering timely presentations of current thinking about basic writing. In this issue, we have a lively range of topics, but with a twist I did not expect. As I worked with the essays most favorably reviewed in recent months, I noticed that three pursue a related theme I have rarely seen discussed in such detail: the effectiveness of teaching of writing patterns to basic writers. Is this coincidence, the beginning of a trend, or the reporting of what has long been underway but little reported? We welcome your responses to these questions and to any others raised by the discussions on these pages.

Our first three essays discuss overarching topics related to basic writing. Attitude as it affects variations in writing skill is discussed by Willa Wolcott and Dianne Buhr in a description of one of their recent studies. Faculty collaborating to create tests for one type of measure of basic writing achievement is described by Jon Jonz in a discussion of method as well as research outcomes. Error is explored by Rei R. Noguchi who uses the perspective of transformational-generative linguistics to suggest fresh ways of understanding certain sentence-level problems.

Next comes the cluster of three essays about writing patterns. Janet R. Gilbert presents a list of language patterns that her research reveals as important, and she offers analyses of student writing before and after basic writers have been instructed in those patterns. Donna Gorrell argues the value of imitation, in its classic forms as well as its modern variations,

for basic writers. Jean Sanborn describes her surprise at the value of sentence combining for the type of advanced ESL student often found in basic writing classes.

We end this collection with two responses to essays in earlier *JBW* issues. Kristine F. Anderson critiques Ann B. Dobie's essay on spelling which appeared in our Fall 1986 issue. Joseph G.R. Martinez and Nancy C. Martinez comment in support of Myra Kogen's essay published in our Spring 1986 issue (another response to the same essay was included in our Spring 1987 *JBW*). We hope that these responses will encourage additional readers to participate in similar exchanges of ideas.

Lynn Quitman Troyka

Willa Wolcott
Dianne Buhr

ATTITUDE AS IT AFFECTS DEVELOPMENTAL WRITERS' ESSAYS

The Writing Center at the University of Florida recently conducted a study to explore whether developmental students' attitudes toward writing relate to their actual writing performance—at once reflecting and affecting their growth as writers. The study represented our second effort¹ to address the significance of attitude as a potential means of answering some puzzling questions. Why, for example, do large discrepancies occur in the rate of improvement among developmental students whose placement essays suggest comparable ability and who are enrolled in the same writing courses? What factors explain the substantial progress which some students seem to make in their writing, while other students appear to decline?

Certainly, such variations in writing growth can be partially attributed to individual developmental factors. Mina Shaughnessy noted, for example, the "private timetable" (276) of the remedial learner, as well as the diversities of skills of developmental writers and the myriad factors influencing their errors. Similarly, Andrea Lunsford has called attention to the difficulties many basic writers experience in synthesizing or analyzing (41). In addition, Elifson and Stone have drawn parallels between the stages of growth apparent in basic writing and what they describe as James Fowler's delineation of the developing stages in the individual.

Willa Wolcott is coordinator of the Writing Center in the Office of Instructional Resources, University of Florida, where she supervised the Developmental English course for two years. She serves as one of the chief readers for the statewide holistic scorings of essays written for the College Level Academic Skills Test and the Florida Teacher Certification Examination.

Dianne Buhr is assistant director of Testing and Evaluation for the Office of Instructional Resources, University of Florida. A doctoral candidate in research and measurement in education, she was formerly responsible for the School of Education's Basic Skills Program, University of Florida.

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At the same time, attitude can also be important in affecting the motivation and performance of students. As J.D. Williams and Scott Alden found, extrinsically motivated students are less eager to improve their writing than are intrinsically motivated peers who see writing as important. According to Shaughnessy, the problem is especially serious for developmental writers. She notes, "By the time he reaches college, the BW both resents and resists his vulnerability as a writer. . . . Writing puts him on the line and he doesn't want to be there" (7).

The effects of apprehension as one part of the general attitude construct have been extensively documented by John Daly and his colleagues. While acknowledging the lack of a close relationship between writing aptitude and writing attitude, Daly found that apprehensive writers score lower on objective tests than do less anxious students. Furthermore, as Daly and Shamo discovered, students' apprehensiveness affects their choice of courses, and according to Daly and Miller, it also influences their choice of occupations. In addition, Faigley, Daly, and Witte found that very apprehensive writers tend to produce shorter, simpler papers than do their more confident peers. This element of student confidence also appears as a factor in the recent work of McCarthy, Meier, and Rederer, who indicate that students' evaluation of the effectiveness of their writing skills is related to the quality of their writing performance. Overall, these studies strongly suggest that students' attitudes toward writing may affect their writing performance.

To conduct our own exploration of what influence attitude might have on writing, we administered a writing attitude questionnaire to 100 developmental writing students (38 male and 62 female) in 1985 at the start of their college career. These students, 92% of whom were Black, had all been specially admitted to the University of Florida with SAT scores below 840. The students wrote a 50-minute expository essay about a person outside their families who had influenced them. An independent team of English instructors trained in holistic assessment scored the essays; the essay scores, together with a Test of Standard Written English score of 37 or below, were used to place the students in a structured writing program. The program included two semesters of intensive work on writing and grammar skills in Writing Center classes and one semester of freshman composition. The curriculum of both courses required students to write several papers.

We gave the attitude questionnaire, a copy of which appears in Appendix A to the essay, during the first week of classes. The questionnaire consists of three broad categories that address students' apprehension about writing, their perceptions of its usefulness, and their understanding of the writing process as it applied to their own practices. Similar to the Daly-Miller instrument, the apprehension subset of the questionnaire (items 8, 11, 12, 15, 19, 20, and 24) explores students' reactions toward completing writing assignments, having their work read by peers, and being graded by a teacher. Because we wanted to broaden our instrument to cover more than students' fears about writing, we included several items that required students to evaluate the importance of writing

both in their previous school experiences and in their anticipated majors and careers. These applicability items (numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18) resemble those found in the "Writing Attitude Scale" by Thomas Reigstaad and Donald McAndrew (38). Still other items (numbers 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30) assess students' understanding and use of prewriting and revising techniques. We felt that students' perceptions of the writing process itself might comprise an integral part of their general attitude toward writing, with those who viewed their writing problems as chiefly grammatical possibly having different attitudes toward writing from those students who recognized more fully the complexities of the composing process. A worksheet for tallying the subset scores is included in Appendix C. To confirm the reliability of the instrument, we administered the questionnaire a week later to half the group selected at random, and we obtained a satisfactory rating of .79 with the Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

On the basis of the ratings students assigned each item of the questionnaire, we classified their overall attitudes toward writing as "high," "medium," or "low"; in addition, we analyzed the scores in terms of the three subsets of process, usefulness, and apprehension. To explore attitudes in relation to writing growth, we evaluated at the end of the second term, students' pre-post performance on two measures: multiple-choice tests of editing skills and timed expository essays. The editing tests, which were matched versions developed in the Writing Center at the University of Florida, consist of 60 items that require students to identify errors of sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. The final essay topic, like the first, required students to draw upon personal experience for their 50 minutes of writing; whereas the pre-topic asked students to discuss an important outside figure in their lives, the post-topic focused on an important decision students had made. The post-essays were intermingled with the first essays for a holistic scoring by a team of independent readers from the English Department. The students gained an average of 6.39 points out of a possible 60 on the editing test, results which proved statistically significant. Their essays also averaged a statistically significant gain of .86 points on a scale from 2 to 8 points.

Only some of the students' attitudes toward writing appeared related to their performance. Not surprisingly in view of the weak connections often cited between writing improvement and grammar study, few links appeared in our study between students' attitudes and their improvement on the editing test: students with "high," "medium," and "low" writing attitudes did not differ significantly in their gains on the editing test. Although students with positive attitudes had performed the best on the initial editing test, their improvement on the final editing test was not substantially better than that made by students with more neutral or negative attitudes. Only in the subset of usefulness did a distinction appear: students who viewed writing as moderately useful improved more on the editing test than did those who perceived writing as unimportant. But with that one exception, students' writing attitudes had little bearing on grammar gain. Because the questionnaire attempted to

measure attitude toward writing rather than toward language alone, we felt that this finding validated our use of the questionnaire as a measure of the construct of "writing attitude." More significantly, it made us reflect again on what the best means might be to address basic writers' apparent need for grammar work, in view of the questionable value grammar study has on either students' attitudes toward writing or their actual writing performance.

Unlike the tenuous link between writing attitude and grammar gain, a more positive relationship appeared between writing attitude and essay gain. Analysis of covariance revealed that the students who comprised the "high," "medium," and "low" categories of writing attitudes also differed significantly on their post-essays when we controlled for their scores on the pre-essays. Thus, students with very positive writing attitudes received significantly higher post-test essay scores than did those with low writing attitude scores. Interestingly, as Table 1 in Appendix B to this essay shows, those students with medium attitude ratings did not differ in a statistically significant way from those students at either end of the scale. To explain this finding we can only speculate that these students who demonstrated an essentially neutral attitude toward writing appeared to be neither hindered nor helped by their views.

Similar distinctions appeared among students' scores in the process and apprehension subsets: As indicated in Table 2 in Appendix B, students with a strong knowledge of the writing process scored significantly higher on the post-essays than did those whose awareness of process fell in the *middle* range. We were not surprised by this result in that students familiar with the prewriting and revising strategies might be expected to perform better on their essays. However, we were puzzled to discover that students with the weakest knowledge of the writing process did not differ to a statistically significant extent in their essay gain from those students at either the middle or the high end of the spectrum. If our sample had been larger, a difference might have appeared. These results suggest that having a good understanding of process is associated with a gain in writing ability, whereas having a lesser understanding, either fair or poor, does not help.

Similar findings occurred with the apprehension subset: As shown in Table 3 in Appendix B, students with low apprehension scores and therefore more confidence in writing scored higher on their post-essays than did those with medium apprehension ratings. The post-essay scores for very apprehensive writers were lower than for the others, although not significantly so; again, however, a larger sample might have made a difference. These results confirm the findings of Daly, Miller, and others concerning the negative effects of apprehension on writers. For us, these results reinforce the need for basic writing teachers to recognize the impact apprehension may have on students in basic writing classes.

The usefulness subset was the only attitude designation apparently having no bearing on essay results: As shown in Table 4 in Appendix B, no significant difference in post-essay scores appeared among the three groups scoring "high," "medium," and "low" on the usefulness subset

when we controlled for the pre-test essay scores. Despite what we intuitively feel should be the case, students' perceptions about the importance of writing in their past, present, or future lives seem unrelated to the students' actual writing improvement.

With the exception of the usefulness subset, we can conclude that for the students of our study, overall writing attitude, as well as apprehension of writing and comprehension of the process involved, seems related to the gain they made in their writing skills. Students with positive attitudes toward writing gained significantly more than did those with either neutral or negative attitudes. That writing improvement seems linked to positive writing attitudes does not, however, imply a causal relationship between the two. Rather, we speculate that the connection may be circular. That is, those students who view writing positively may work harder and perform better than their peers in their actual writing assignments, thereby having their positive feelings reinforced. Those students with neutral or negative feelings about writing, on the other hand, either may be apprehensive about putting forth as much effort or may be discouraged by poor results from trying harder. Thus, our work suggests that attitude, like the individual developmental factors, may partially account for some of the disparate gains in basic writing classes.

We feel, however, that the role attitude may play in writing should not be overstated, as our sample was small and our instrument limited to addressing a few components of the attitude construct. Our study did not control for such variables as individual teaching quality or reader reliability in the holistic scoring process. Moreover, because our study was confined to one group of students during a span of two semesters, we need to conduct more research before we can generalize our findings to other basic writers. Nevertheless, the results make us consider the possible teaching implications for students who have negative attitudes toward writing combined with weak composing performance.

The need for modifying such negative attitudes is critical. As John Daly observes, "A positive attitude about writing is associated with, and may even be a critical precursor of, the successful development and maintenance of writing skills" ("Writing Apprehension" 44). As basic writing instructors, we can undertake this task by continuing to familiarize our students with the writing process, by helping them deal with their writing apprehension, and by making them more cognizant of the importance of writing.

As indicated by the responses to the questionnaire, many entering students either do not know or do not practice a process approach to writing. Therefore, clarifying the writing process for them seems an essential first step in modifying their attitudes toward writing. We instructors must continue to help our students to develop strategies for prewriting and revising, to practice collaborative learning through the peer review of papers, and, most importantly, to focus not on the written product alone but on the larger writing process. Though certainly not new, all

these practices are important if students are to have a manageable idea of how to proceed with writing assignments.

In addition to demystifying the writing process, we teachers must also deal with students' apprehension by attempting to find where, why, and how their particular stumbling blocks occur (Selfe 93). As Mina Shaughnessy discussed, and as the protocol analyses of Muriel Harris have recently confirmed, the individual causes of writing problems vary widely, from excessive rereading or premature editing to a debilitating preoccupation with what a teacher will deem "correct" (Harris 171-174). Therefore, we must continue to observe and confer with students as they write in class to determine the particular sources of their writing difficulty. At the same time, as McCutcheon, Hull, and Smith suggest in their work on the editing practices of basic writers, we teachers must identify which strategies, intuitive or learned, our students are already using effectively. Then we can either build on their existing strengths or we can, as Harris suggests, use modeling techniques, films, or videotapes to demonstrate strategies that will help them overcome their problems.

Finally, as teachers we can work toward increasing students' realization of the usefulness of writing both in their college careers and in the workplace. This study did not reveal much connection between students' writing improvement and their perceptions about the usefulness of writing. Nevertheless, as Paul V. Anderson points out, unless students grasp the importance that writing plays for most college-educated employees, students may be unwilling to put forth the necessary effort to improve their writing skills (75). Thus, in our teaching, we can inform students of the findings of Robert Bataille and of Pearl Aldrich, who surveyed managers in different fields to determine both the extent of writing and the writing traits valued most highly in real-world situations. Aldrich found, for example, that many managers did not know how to plan and organize their writing, nor did they consider issues of audience and purpose (286). Bataille also stressed the importance of audience, as well as "qualities like persuasiveness, clarity, and conciseness" (280). To augment these findings, we can ask students to discuss together the types of writing encountered in various fields, or we can assign them the task of finding out the nature of writing that their majors will require. Lastly, we can design some of our expository assignments around such work requirements as memos, reports, or letters (Anderson 73).

Through this combination of approaches, all of us involved with basic writers can work to improve students' attitudes toward writing. As Ernest Boyer notes in comments which echo the "exact man" of Francis Bacon, "Clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing. Perhaps more than other forms of communication, writing holds us responsible for our words and ultimately makes us more thoughtful human beings" (21). Part of our task as instructors must be to help these students, who so often dread writing, make the same discovery.

APPENDIX A
University of Florida
Writing Center
Writing Attitude Questionnaire

Name _____

Writing course _____
you are now taking

Reading course _____
you are now taking

Expected Major _____

The following questionnaire asks you about your attitude toward writing and about the process you use whenever you write. Please respond as honestly as you can by checking the category that best describes your reaction to each statement listed.

Note: Your answers will not affect any courses you are now taking.

	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 No Opinion	2 Dis- agree	1 Strongly Disagree
1. In the past, writing has not been a necessary skill for me to know.					
2. Writing was never emphasized during my secondary school days.					
3. Children should be required to write more in elementary school.					
4. During high school I was required to write a report or a short paper almost every month.					
5. My English classes in high school should have required me to do more writing.					
6. Until now I have never written much for personal reasons.					
7. College students should be required to take at least two writing courses.					

	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly	Agree	No	Dis-	Strongly
	Agree	Agree	Opinion	agree	Disagree
8. I would never willingly choose to take a writing course at college.					
9. Writing is an essential skill that I should master.					
10. My main goal in my writing course is to get a better grade.					
11. I dislike having my writing graded.					
12. I dislike writing, and I am always relieved to finish any writing assignments.					
13. My chief objective in my writing course is to learn to communicate better.					
14. I enjoy writing letters to family and friends.					
15. I do not like to have other students read my papers.					
16. Writing either has been or will be an important skill in the rest of my college work.					
17. My major requires much writing.					
18. I expect to write reports, memos, and similar documents in my future career.					

	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly		No	Dis-	Strongly
	Agree	Agree	Opinion	agree	Disagree
19. In the future I plan to conduct my personal affairs by telephone rather than by writing.					
20. I would never choose a major that requires much writing.					
21. Putting my thoughts down on paper helps me to straighten out my thinking.					
22. I have difficulty organizing my ideas.					
23. I always jot down ideas before I begin my writing.					
24. I rarely have anything significant to say.					
25. I prepare an outline or similar sketch before I begin to write.					
26. My frequent mistakes in grammar and punctuation hurt my writing.					
27. I do not have to spend much time on my writing assignments.					
28. I generally limit my revision of papers to the correction of spelling or punctuation errors.					
29. Whenever I write, I am aware of the persons who will be reading my paper.					
30. Each time that I write, I know clearly what I want to accomplish.					

APPENDIX B

Table 1

Overall Writing Attitude

	(Attitude Scores of 83 and above)	(Attitude Scores of 70 to 82)	(Attitude Scores of 69 and below)
Post-essay Adjusted Mean	High 5.81	Medium 5.35	Low 4.97

Table 2

Process Subset of Attitude Questionnaire

	(8 to 20)	(3 to 7)	(-12 to 2)
Post-essay Adjusted Means	High 5.85	Medium 5.12	Low 5.34

Table 3

Apprehension Subset

	(-15 and above)	(-20 to -16)	(-21 and below)
Post-essay Adjusted means	Low 5.78	Medium 5.17	Severe 5.21

Table 4

Usefulness Subset

	(20 and above)	(13 to 19)	(12 and below)
Post-essay Adjusted Mean	High 5.57	Medium 5.38	Low 5.10

APPENDIX C

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Name: _____ Attitude Total: _____

- I. Assign to each number below the corresponding numerical rating of the box the student has checked on the questionnaire (e.g., a 5 beside question 3 would mean the student has checked strongly agree).
- II. To determine the sub-totals, add the positive questions and subtract the total value of the negative questions in that subset. Category II is entirely negative.
- III. To determine the final attitude score, add the sub-totals to a base of 60.

<u>Usefulness of Writing</u>	<u>Positive Questions</u>	<u>Negative Questions</u>
Past	3) 4) 5)	1)
Present	7) 9) 13) 16) 17)	10)
Future	18)	
Personal Reasons	14)	6)
		Sub Total: _____

<u>Apprehensiveness about Writing</u>	8) 11) 12) 15) 19) 20) 24)	
		Sub Total: _____

<u>Understanding of Process</u>		
Prewriting	21) 23) 25)	
Organization		22)
Grammar		26)
Writing/Revising		27) 28)
Audience/Purpose	29) 30)	
		Sub-Total: _____

Note

¹The first study, "The Effect of Developmental English Students' Perceptions about the Importance of Writing on Their Performance in Composition Classes," was presented at the Southeastern Writing Center Conference, Atlanta, in April 1985. It is available in ERIC, ED 260 446. The results of the first study were inconclusive. However, the first study differed in several respects from the one we discuss in this essay; not only was the first sample one-third smaller than the present sample, but also the course sequence prescribed for the students was changed by state mandate. Furthermore, the "Writing Attitude Questionnaire" is more comprehensive than an earlier draft we used for the first study.

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Jon Jonz

USING POOLED JUDGMENTS TO DEVELOP TESTS OF BASIC WRITING

In this paper I describe the technique that we at East Texas State University use to create, administer, and monitor valid and reliable measures of the writing skills of students enrolled in basic writing courses.¹ Our technique meets two major needs: it provides one means by which the instructors of basic writing students² may benefit from the judgments of colleagues in assessing the skill levels of their students, and it allows students to have an audience beyond the class in which they are enrolled.

BACKGROUND

Each semester the instructors of our basic writing course prepare alternate versions of a reading/writing test for students seeking to exit the course. The purpose for the test is to provide instructors and students with information, not to certify proficiency in reading and writing nor to evaluate achievement in the course. Instructors add this information to their record of student accomplishment in the course and consider it as but one component of final-grade and course-exit decisions. Were the test to be used to certify proficiency, in fairness to students and in deference to what is well known about the variability in an individual's language production from one occasion and one context to the next, the test itself would need to be longer, to be given under unspeeded conditions, to offer a variety of topics, and to elicit a variety of writing samples, at least.³

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Our test, though clearly a proficiency test, is not used as the single certificate of proficiency. None should be. Our test might most clearly be viewed as simply one element of a larger proficiency measure: the course itself. The portfolio of writing that each student generates during the course is the raw data of this larger proficiency measure, and the judgment that a student's instructor makes is the certification of proficiency upon which we rely.⁴

The fact of the test figures into the conduct of the course and is an element that is viewed positively by student and instructor alike. Students know that the test results are not binding on instructors and that grades do not depend solely on those results. Students also know that their instructor will not be the only audience for their work. They know that they will have at least this one opportunity to be evaluated by outside raters, basic writing instructors who do not know whose papers they are reading. Likewise, instructors know that their students' work will be subject to the scrutiny of departmental colleagues at the conclusion of the term.

The test, sample of which I have provided in Appendix A to this essay, requires students to read a stimulus passage and to prepare a written response. This format is appealing for a number of reasons. First, integrative reading/writing skills are precisely what the course is designed to teach; separating reading from writing for teaching and testing purposes reflects a view of language skills to which we do not subscribe. Second, the test consistently prompts the kind of writing that the course emphasizes: expository prose written for a general academic audience. Third, studies that we have conducted demonstrate that the format is reliable and valid. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the test-construction process itself capitalizes on the judgmental processes of experienced teachers of basic writing. Each of these points deserves some elaboration.

First, our test format reflects quite completely the published objectives of the course. Therefore, it has validity on its face that discrete-point, objective tests would most certainly lack. One might use a standardized reading test or a multiple-choice grammar and usage test to provide course-exit data. One might even demonstrate that the results of these discretely focused tests match other measures of student skill: essay grades or course grades, for example. But this kind of formal demonstration of criterion-related validity often lacks the intuitively appealing and convincing qualities associated with face validity.

Second, our test appeals to us because it reflects the pedagogical philosophy that underlies our course: we do not assume language proficiency to be equivalent to the sum of discretely identifiable subproficiencies. The committee who designed the course did not create a series of discretely isolable and measurable objectives. In fact, the committee rejected the traditional word-sentence-paragraph-essay approach to teaching reading and writing, devising instead a process-driven course during all stages of which students read and write in discourse units that possess a good deal of contextual integrity. The test we devised as an exit

measure in such a course could hardly lack contextual integrity itself, so nothing less than an integrative reading/writing test would do.⁵

Another reason for our satisfaction with our testing procedure is that formal studies we have conducted demonstrate that its format is stable: it tends to produce reliable results each time it is employed. These studies also support the claim that our tests measure exactly what we want them to measure.

Yet another reason underlying our choice of testing procedure is that we have not found better measuring devices to employ in questions of language proficiency than the considered judgments of skilled, experienced language teachers.⁶ It is that judgment that is central to holistic scoring, and it is that judgment, in fact, that we rely upon as a final measure of proficiency in the form of a course grade.

A final part of our rationale is that the test format appears to stimulate the sort of writing that we expect it to stimulate. By far the most frequent mode or type of written response that the test evokes is exposition. The test itself, however, specifies no particular mode, and the suggestions that each version of the test makes regarding possible responses are not designed specifically to evoke expository prose. The test format does not specify a rhetorical situation, yet students rarely fail to write the expository prose of uncertain and unsophisticated learners. Students rarely appear to be writing for anyone other than a panel of English teachers as their audience with the purpose of demonstrating reading and writing proficiency.⁷ The reason for these facts is clear. Students know that the course is designed to prepare them for the standard sequence of writing courses in the department. They also know that their instructors have encouraged them to produce writing that would stand up to scrutiny in those courses: exposition, argumentation, persuasion. Students also know that the exit examination is a feature of the course, and they will have encountered exit examinations from previous semesters as classroom activities in most sections of the course.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEST

The test-construction process begins about midway through each academic term when a call for topics and passages is circulated among course instructors. Each instructor of the course is asked to submit three passages suitable for use in test prompts. In our call, we make no suggestions for topics, give no counsel regarding appropriateness, and specify no parameters within which instructors are to limit their choices. Instructors employ only their own inherent judgmental processes. Previous versions of the test are on file, however, and are readily available to instructors to use as a guide to acceptability.

Once passages have been collected, they are photoduplicated and circulated among the instructors with the request that they assign a rating to each passage on a scale of 1 to 4. A rating of "4" means that the passage in question is an excellent selection, that it will work well as a test passage, and that it will require little, if any, editing to make it appropriate. A rating of

"3" means that the selection has potential as a test passage, but that it would require a good deal of editing to be truly suitable. A rating of "2" means that the selection should be ignored, that it has none but the slightest hint of potential, and that it would be more trouble than it merits to turn it into a suitable passage. A rating of "1" means that a selection has no potential whatsoever.

We feel that this stage of the selection process approximates pretesting of the passages. Under other circumstances, established test-construction procedure would require a field trial of individual passages. If we used the test results for purposes other than those I discuss here, we would consider pretesting each prompt. However, given our circumstances and our track record (see below), it is uneconomical and unnecessary to do anything more elaborate than to pool the judgment of the course instructors.

After the passages have been rated and returned, the results are tallied, and we generally find that three to five passages have attracted top ratings. At this point any of these top-rated selections could be turned into a fine prompt. However, at least two or three instructors will have expressed reservations or will have made editorial suggestions concerning even the most highly rated selections. Therefore, we further capitalize on instructors' judgment by again circulating the top-rated selections. This time each instructor is asked to rank order the passages and to make editorial suggestions. Instructors are also asked to offer appropriate headnotes and suggestions to students to be included in the test. Based on these final rankings and editorial suggestions, we select the top two passages and draft the tests. Every suggestion is incorporated into the drafts, and in the rare event that suggestions from two instructors conflict with one another, we confer and compromise.

After the two tests are drafted, they are circulated among the instructors for final suggestions, revisions, and additions. This final step is advisable because passages interact with their lead-in material, with the suggestions to students, and with the general directions. These interactions usually prompt a final barrage of suggestions from the instructors, and once again (and for the final time) we consider, collate, and confer until all reservations are removed. The tests are then ready to be printed.

We have three reasons for creating more than one test for each examination period. First, the exams are not administered to all students at the same time, so we have something of a security problem. Second, with more than one topic the instructors who read and rate the writing do not have to read dozens of samples on the same topic. Although some test-development experts have suggested that the need for uniformity requires that all students write on the same topic, our experience has been that raters enjoy a little variety. As I will presently show, we have not been able to detect inexplicable differences in the ratings assigned samples prompted by one topic rather than another.

And that fact, in a way, is the product of our third reason for having at least two test passages: the results produced by one passage can be studied in comparison to the results produced by the other. One test serves as a criterion against which to judge the other. The test passages are randomly

assigned to classes, and judges are randomly assigned to rate sets of writing samples; thus, we could reasonably attribute any great differences in results produced by the test passages to variation in the passages themselves.

MONITORING TEST RESULTS

With minor and interpretable exceptions, the tests that we have developed have worked quite well. In our scrutiny of test results we check four characteristics of test scores and course grades: (1) the percentage of students failing the tests, (2) the percentage of students failing the course, (3) the degree to which readers of the students' writing samples concur in their ratings, and (4) the degree to which students' ratings on the test match their course grades. Tables 1 through 3 in Appendix B summarize such data for a recent two and one-half year period.

In three of the five semesters for which data are presented (that is, semesters I, II, IV), the data provide strong evidence for the stability and trustworthiness of the testing procedure. For example, in each of these three semesters each test produced a similar failure rate (Table 1). We interpret this to mean that students found the multiple forms of the test to be equally challenging. An alternate interpretation, of course, is that raters simply display a thoroughgoing bias to judge half of the writing samples as passing and half as failing. However, we have been able to discount this interpretation by carefully studying raters in training sessions where we have manipulated the pass/fail ratio of the writing samples. Raters tend to approximate closely in their own ratings the pass/fail ratio that has been purposely built into the samples.

Likewise, the high agreement between raters (Table 2) is strong evidence for the stability of the testing procedure in semesters I, II, and IV. Not only do raters tend to assign approximately equivalent numbers of failing marks to a given set of writing samples, they also tend to assign the same ratings to the same samples. Similarly, course grades (Table 3) match test results for three out of every four students for semesters I, II, and IV.

The data for two semesters of the study (semesters III and V), however, present a different array of results. In semester III, for example, writing on the second topic was apparently harder for students than writing on the first topic (Table 1). Instructors, however, adjusted for this problem quite nicely, not even knowing at the time that a problem existed: they awarded course grades in concert with test ratings in only 65% of the cases (Table 3), correcting for the artificially depressed exam ratings. If the test were to have been the only factor determining course grades, such a difference between the results produced by the two test forms could possibly have warranted testing again using different forms. Our testing and grading procedures, however, compensated nicely for the problem, and no harm resulted. In fact, two benefits were realized. First, the failure rate on the second form (74%) represents a serendipitously derived confirmation that no "50% pass/50% fail" rating bias existed. Second, there is evidence that the strong relationship between test ratings and course grades (Table 3) is a substantial one, not one

resulting from “hyperrespect” for test results. If such were not the case, the relationship between test rating and course grade would have stayed at previous levels and would not have dipped to compensate for the unexpected results produced by the second test topic.

The results from the testing and grading in semester V also represent a deviation from previous patterns. At first glance, it appears that the alternate test topic once again proved to be somewhat more difficult than the first (Table 1). The rest of the data, however, do not tend to support such a conclusion. The elevation in failure rate for the exam (Table 3) to some ten percentage points above the previous high rate is attended by a similarly sharp increase in the failure rate for the course over the previous spring’s (semester III) rate. Additionally, raters registered the largest percentage of agreement (Table 2) of all semesters considered in the study, a result that tends to confirm that the quality of student writing was below that of previous terms. In the case of semester V, then, students had produced writing of significantly lesser quality on the test than ever before, the raters agreed that they had, and instructors awarded course grades accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The procedure I have described in this essay is a stable and robust procedure that we have used with confidence to develop alternate forms of exit-test prompts. However, if such tests were to be the sole criterion by which student writing proficiency were judged, the alternate forms would need to be pretested and demonstrated to be of equivalent difficulty. A preferable solution, and the solution to which we subscribe, is to collect evidence of writing proficiency from as many sources as possible on as many occasions as possible before assigning final course grades.

(Continued)

Appendix A

Sample Exit-Test Prompt

The author of the following passage tells about a self-discovery game that led her to examine the different roles that she plays. The passage leaves the reader with a question about when a person is his or her "real" self and when he or she is simply playing a role. As you read the passage, be thinking about all of the roles you play.

We all play many roles in our lives. At a recent group meeting, the members were asked to list their roles on cards: husband, father, mother, teacher, student, sister, daughter, tutor, friend, volunteer worker, and so forth. We all felt we had too many roles. Then, one-by-one, we were asked to discard our roles by throwing one card at a time on the floor. I happily threw away "student." It's a role that I don't like very much. Next, I threw away one of my part-time jobs; I have too many, anyway. Throwing away roles was fun, and it seemed to make my life much less complicated until I got down to the last roles: Mother and friend.

"I'm not playing anymore," I said. "I have to have these roles to make life worth living."

That statement led the group to discuss what roles were the most important to them. Some picked the role of husband, some picked the role that they play at work, and other picked the role of student. It was an interesting exercise, and we all agreed that it was quite important for us to carefully examine our roles from time to time.

Write a well-organized, detailed response to some narrowed aspect of the subject of the reading passage. Your response should express your ideas and should not simply restate the points made in the passage; your response should not be merely a summary.

In writing your response, you might want to consider, for example, how the various roles you play differ from one another. On the other hand, you might want to tell why you prefer one role to another. Do you prefer your role as a student, for example, to your role as a family member, friend, employee, ball player, sorority or fraternity member, or date?

Another possibility is for you to consider the way that other people whom you know play their roles. Perhaps you know somebody who has a job or a talent or a hobby that always keeps him or her before the public. Does the person you know in private show up in that person's public role?

Whatever narrowed aspect of the subject you choose to write about, remember that your response should reflect your own experiences and point of view, and it should clearly display mastery of the skills that you have learned in English 100.

For your final draft, use only the answer sheet that your instructor provides. Do not make any marks on your answer sheet that you do not want the faculty judges to take into consideration as they rate your work.

You may use a dictionary if you wish.

Appendix B

Table 1

Failure Rate by Test Passage

Semester	Passage 1 (n)	Passage 2 (n)	Passage 3 (n)	χ^2 (df)
I	51% (55)	57% (46)		.13(1), ns
II	46% (46)	52% (66)	50% (40)	.38(2), ns
III	58% (40)	74% (23)		1.06(1), ns
IV	61% (41)	50% (50)		.69(1), ns
V	65% (26)	78% (41)		.73(1), ns

Table 2

Agreement Between Raters

Semester	Percentage of Agreement
I	79%
II	71%
III	75%
IV	73%
V	83%

Table 3

Failure Rates and Agreement Between Exam Rating and Course Grade

Semester	Final Exam Failure Rate	Course Failure Rate	Agreement Between Final Exam and Course Grade
I	54%	32%	74%
II	49%	29%	76%
III	63%	38%	65%
IV	55%	44%	76%
V	73%	49%	70%

Notes

¹In the time since this essay was first prepared, a university committee has recommended, over the objection of the basic skills staff, that the *necessary condition* for exiting the basic writing course be a passing mark on a holistically scored essay written under timed-test conditions. Unfortunately, this recommendation has been implemented.

²All new undergraduate students (including those who transfer fewer than 21 semester hours of credit) whose ACT composite score falls between 14 and 17 (SAT combined verbal and math score of 700-790) and whose English subtest score is 13 or below (SAT verbal 310 or below) are required to enroll in our basic reading/writing course. Students who do not earn "C" or better in this required course within two semesters of enrollment are suspended from the university for a period of one calendar year.

³Lee Odell, for example, advises us to give students the opportunity to make their best showing so that our judgments are not limited and misleading. He gives the following guidelines:

Have students write under circumstances that approximate the conditions under which important writing is done; ask them to do more than one kind of writing—that is, have them write for more than one audience and purpose; provide them with information about audience and purpose for which a given piece of writing is intended; assess the demands of our writing assignments, especially when we create more than one assignment; base our judgments on an adequate amount of students' writing. (113)

⁴Elbow and Belanoff report using panel-judged portfolios as the basis for course-exit decisions. Students are not allowed to exit the course with the minimum passing grade (C) until their coursework portfolios are judged passing by at least one instructor in addition to the student's own. In contrast, the testing system I report here leaves that final judgment in the hands of the student's instructor.

⁵Readers of this essay might ask how we know whether a student has a "reading problem" or a "writing problem" and how we dare appear "antidiagnostic" in times of great attention to detail in diagnosis and prescription. In our experience it is the rare student who has *either* one sort of problem or the other and who also meets East Texas State University's admission standards. It is also the rare student whose reading or writing skills are so intractably underdeveloped that an integrative approach does not make powerful inroads into the improvement of both.

⁶Charles Cooper warns:

There is, of course, a serious reliability problem. To overcome it, groups of teachers or researchers have to work together to train themselves as raters. They have to cooperate further to obtain multiple independent ratings of at least two pieces of a student's writing. (21)

We are convinced that we comply in fact and in spirit with this advice. The study I report in this essay emphasizes the interjudge reliability of our testing procedure as well as our preference for using test results only in conjunction with other assessments of student writing proficiency.

⁷Our testing situation approximates what Hoetker refers to as the *real* rhetorical situation (see also Hoetker and Brossell, 329):

Most students, regardless of what role they are asked to assume or what audience they are asked to imagine, write for what they imagine is their real audience—hypercritical English teachers. Their ideas about the readership of the test and about what will impress that readership are often stereotyped and faulty. I suggest that it would be better to establish accurately and fully the *real* rhetorical situation. What sorts of people will be reading the papers? What will they be looking for? How will they be evaluating? How will the readers probably respond to first-person essays? To elevated diction? To mechanical errors? And so forth. (387)

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Rei R. Noguchi

TRANSFORMATIONAL- GENERATIVE SYNTAX AND THE TEACHING OF SENTENCE MECHANICS

Of the various skills needed in writing, the skill to detect and eliminate certain mechanical errors—run-ons, comma splices, unintentional sentence fragments, lack of subject-verb agreement—would seem one of the easiest to master. After all, such errors deal not with paragraphs or whole essays but with individual sentences. Further, as the often-used designation “sentence mechanics” suggests, such errors deal with “mechanics,” something machinelike, automatic. Yet, teachers of writing all too often encounter native writers, both basic and nonbasic, who progress in the higher-level writing skills (e.g., invention and organization) but still write with runons, comma splices, fragments, and lack of subject-verb agreement. Indeed, the mechanical errors occur with such frequency that teachers begin to question not just their teaching methods but the linguistic competence of their students. Where exactly does the fault lie? More importantly, given that most students have had little or no formal training in traditional or modern grammar, what can be done to eliminate such persistent errors? This essay, written from the perspective of transformational-generative linguistics, suggests that these errors persist not because of the lack of language ability in students but because of the instructor’s lack in exploiting that ability.

Basic writing instructors know that writing exhibiting run-on sentences, comma splices, unintentional sentence fragments, and errors in subject-verb agreement invites strongly negative linguistic and social

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criticism. Many in society, often in positions of power, view such mechanical errors as signs of illiteracy, if not mental incompetence. Given the constraints of the reader-writer relationship and the difference between writing and speech, instructors will have more success changing the habits of the offending writers rather than the habits of a censorious public. Yet, eliminating mechanical errors has proved a formidable task for both students and teachers of writing. Although the traditional handbooks offer "rules" to aid in the correction of these errors, the rules are in actual practice difficult to apply, especially if students have had little or no formal study of grammar. For example, traditional handbooks instruct students to make the verb of a sentence agree in number with its subject. But, this seemingly simple and straightforward rule is impossible to apply if students do not know what the term "subject" means or how to locate a subject in an actual sentence. Another seemingly accessible handbook rule states that a fragment is not a sentence and, hence, cannot be punctuated as one. For students to understand and apply this rule, however, they must first understand what is meant by "sentence"; but to understand what is meant by a sentence, they must understand what an independent clause is, and to understand the latter, they must understand what a subject and verb are.

For writing instructors, the path proves equally tortuous. To help students eliminate, for example, sentence fragments, instructors might try explaining the concept of fragment. But to do so inevitably leads to the concept of sentence, which, in turn, leads to the concepts of independent clause, subject, and verb. As most writing teachers can attest, the same tortuous route applies in explaining the concepts of run-on sentences and comma splices. The crux of the problem is obvious: much of conventional instruction to correct run-on sentences, comma splices, sentence fragments, and errors in subject-verb agreement makes reference not merely to opaque grammatical terms but, worse still, to opaque grammatical terms which interlink in their definitions with other equally opaque grammatical terms.

To help students correct sentence mechanics, writing instructors need a method which eliminates the dovetailing of grammatical concepts, one which enables students to identify the relevant grammatical categories *independently* of other grammatical categories. The standard, or classical, model of transformational-generative grammar can serve as a significant pedagogical aid here.¹ The model posits two levels of representation for sentences, an abstract deep structure of meaning relationships and a concrete surface structure of realized sentences. The surface structure is derived from the deep structure by a set of rules, or transformations. As I will demonstrate shortly, it is the transformational part which proves useful in the correcting of sentence mechanics. What makes the transformational part particularly useful is that transformational rules are sensitive to various syntactic categories.

Take, for example, the rule of Tag-Formation, which relates the *a* and the *b* sentences in each pair of sentences below:

- 1a. John can swim.
b. John can swim, can't he?
- 2a. The neighbors will be moving to Los Angeles.
b. The neighbors will be moving to Los Angeles, won't they?
- 3a. The car with the mag wheels and the tinted windows has been washed.
b. The car with the mag wheels and the tinted windows has been washed, hasn't it?
- 4a. Betty studied her chemistry last night.
b. Betty studied her chemistry last night, didn't she?

If given only the *a* sentences above, native speakers of English can easily transform them into the corresponding *b* sentences—that is, into the tag-questions. Writing instructors can readily demonstrate this both to themselves and to their students by reading the *a* sentences in class and having their students orally produce the corresponding tag-questions.

But how is it possible that native speakers of English can perform such transformations so effortlessly? Specially, how do native speakers create the “tags” (e.g., the *can't he*, *won't they*, *hasn't it*, *didn't she*) at the ends of the original declarative sentences and thereby convert the declarative sentences into tag-questions? Native speakers certainly have not memorized the corresponding tag-question for each declarative sentence. Rather, they have internalized a rule, here the rule of Tag-Formation, which enables them to transform each declarative sentence into the corresponding tag-question. While linguists have formulated Tag-Formation in different ways,² most agree that the rule essentially copies certain constituents of a sentence to create the tag at the end. The grammatical elements which get copied are the first auxiliary verb (if none occurs, a form of *do* is added instead), the verb tense, the negative *not* in contracted form (if the sentence is positive), and the subject noun phrase in pronominal form. Although Tag-Formation is a complex rule involving several operations, all native speakers of English have an implicit knowledge of the rule; otherwise they would be unable in daily life to transform the *a* sentences in 1-4 into their corresponding tag-questions. This fact is highly important, for if native speakers already know the rule of Tag-Formation (although they may not be able to state it explicitly in the manner linguists do), instructors do not have to teach the rule. After all, instructors cannot teach students what they already know. A second and more important point follows: if native speakers of English already know the rule of Tag-Formation, they must also know the syntactic categories involved in the rule; that is, native speakers of English, whatever their formal background in grammar, already have an underlying knowledge of such syntactic categories as sentence, auxiliary verb, tense, negative, and (subject) noun phrase. (How else could they correctly identify and copy these elements in the tag?) Stated in a somewhat different way, even though students may lack the ability to

assign traditional labels to certain syntactic categories, they nevertheless unconsciously know what they are. It is precisely this unconscious knowledge of syntactic categories that writing instructors should exploit in the teaching and correcting of sentence mechanics.

Yet, just how can instructors exploit this underlying knowledge of syntactic categories? The correction of sentence fragments can serve as an illustration. To understand the notion of sentence fragment, students need to make use of the concept of sentence (i.e., a sentence fragment is only a "part" of a sentence). But herein lies a pedagogical problem. How can writing instructors introduce the concepts of sentence without also invoking such dovetailing concepts as independent clause, subject, and predicate? The solution is to bypass these latter concepts and to exploit directly the student's implicit underlying knowledge of the syntactic category "sentence." That students already have an intuitive knowledge of what constitutes a sentence is clearly evident in their ability to use the Tag-Formation rule to transform any declarative *sentence*—e.g., the *a* sentences in 1-4 above—into its corresponding tag-question. Put in a slightly different way, Tag-Formation operates on only declarative (and imperative) sentences, not fragments. If this is so, the rule will operate on sentences such as 1*a*, 2*a*, 3*a*, and 4*a* but not on sequences such as:

5. Although John will stay home.
6. Whatever was bothering the neighbors.
7. Who saw that she had been trying.
8. Waiting for the show to begin.

As suggested earlier, if students are asked to transform sentences like 1*a*, 2*a*, 3*a*, and 4*a* into their corresponding tag-questions, they can easily perform the transformation; however, with sequences like 5-8, they will find the task impossible since Tag-Formation works only for declarative (and imperative) sentences, not fragments. Put in the most simplistic terms, if a sequence of words can be transformed into a proper tag-question, it is a sentence; if not, it's a fragment.³ Worth emphasizing here is that students do not need to know how to formulate the Tag-Formation rule to realize this fact; neither is it necessary for instructors to introduce transformational-generative linguistics as background. Yet, if instructors can get students to recognize the simple fact that tag-questions cannot be formed from fragments, then students will have an easily and always available means of testing for fragments—and without first having to undergo time-consuming and often confusing formal instruction in what constitutes a sentence, independent clause, subject, predicate, and so on.

The Tag-Formation rule can also help identify and correct run-on sentences and comma splices. This is so because, as suggested above, the Tag-Formation rule differentiates between two general types of word sequences: a sentence and a nonsentence. Technically speaking, neither a run-on nor a common splice is a bona fide sentence since each consists of two or more sentences incorrectly joined as one sentence. The value of the Tag-Formation rule is that it can be utilized to determine the

“sentencehood” of the whole sequence (i.e., the run-on or comma splice) and its parts. For purposes of demonstration, instructors might ask their students to write the proper tag-questions for such sequences as the comma splice in 9 below, and the run-on in 10:

9. Jerry decided to become an accountant, Susan became a doctor.

10. The guard made his nightly rounds all seemed in order.

With sequences like 9 and 10, students either will be unable to produce a proper tag-question (in which case they will have strong evidence that the sequences are nonsentences), or they will produce the following sequences:

11. Jerry decided to become an accountant, Susan became a doctor, didn't she?

12. The guard made his nightly rounds all seemed in order, didn't it?

If asked to read sequences 11 and 12 aloud, however, most students will find them unnatural as individual sentences because one part sounds like a question and the remaining part does not. If requested to do so, most students can also separate the question part from the nonquestion part (it's generally easier to separate two unlikes than two likes). The separation point, of course, is the point where the run-on or comma splice actually occurs. Ignoring punctuation and capitalization, sequences 11 and 12 will thus divide into two parts:

13. Jerry decided to become an accountant // Susan became a doctor, didn't she?

14. The guard made his nightly rounds // all seemed in order, didn't it?

To demonstrate further that run-ons and comma splices incorrectly join sentences, instructors should ask students to form a tag-question from the remaining part (i.e., the first, or nonquestion, part) of 13 and 14. Again, most students will be able to do so because this part, like the second part, is also a sentence.

The ability to use the Tag-Formation rule as a testing device can, of course, be highly valuable in the actual correction of run-ons and comma splices. Logically, the detection of run-ons and comma splices is necessarily prior to correction. The advantage of using the method outlined above is that if students are instructed not to join sentences with merely commas or no punctuation at all, they can use the Tag-Formation rule to identify just what parts of suspect sequences are individual sentences and then insert the correct form of punctuation. If the lack of a semicolon is the mechanical error, an added boon is that the method can be used to demonstrate (or verify) that a semicolon, in its primary function, should join sentences, not fragments.

Lastly, the use of underlying syntactic knowledge can help identify and correct errors in subject-verb agreement. With errors in subject-verb agreement, the primary source of error lies in locating the subject of the sentence—that is, the noun phrase (more specifically, the noun) constituent with which the verb agrees in number. To simplify matters here, I exclude from discussion collective noun phrases; noun phrases following the expletive, *there*; and compound noun phrases joined by *or*; all

of which require special rules. I make these exclusions in order to focus on the more general type of error, namely, errors dealing with the simple misidentification of the subject. This kind of error usually occurs because some phrase (e.g., prepositional phrase, participial phrase) or some subordinate clause intervenes between the main clause subject and its verb. The following sentences (where the symbol * designates an ungrammatical sentence) exemplify this type of error:

15. *The use of electronic security devices have increased in the last decade.
16. *The company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were going bankrupt.

In the two sentences above, the sources of the agreement errors are the intervening prepositional phrase (i.e., *of electronic security devices*) in 15 and the intervening relative clause (i.e., *which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles*) in 16.

Conventional instruction to eliminate agreement errors such as those in 15 and 16 is, however, fraught with difficulty. To help eliminate subject-verb agreement errors caused by intervening constructions, writing instructors might, for example, try explaining that prepositional phrases, or more accurately, objects of prepositions, can never serve as subjects of sentences; however, this leaves the onerous task of explaining just what constitutes a prepositional phrase or an object of a preposition, and, inescapably, what constitutes a preposition (not to mention what constitutes a subject). If instructors attempt to explain that relative clauses, or more specifically, noun phrases in relative clauses, also cannot serve as subjects of main clauses, an even greater store of proliferating categories lies on the horizon (e.g., main clause, dependent clause, relative pronoun, subject, verb, noun phrase).

To break the chain of interlinking categories, writing instructors can again make use of the implicit syntactic knowledge of their students. Since the Tag-Formation rule makes reference to the notion of subject (i.e., it's the subject which gets copied in pronominal form in the tag), the rule would seem to provide an effective means of identifying subjects of sentences. All one needs to do to locate the subject of a sentence is to form the derivative tag-question, locate the pronoun (or simply, the last word) in the tag, and determine which word in the sentence the pronoun refers to (i.e., "stands for"). However, a discomforting problem may arise here. In sentences like 15 and 16 above, the Tag-Formation rule will not always work in identifying subjects for all students. For example, given the grammatical declarative sentences 17a and 18a below, students will produce the corresponding grammatical tag-questions 17b and 18b:

- 17a. The use of electronic security devices has increased in the last decade.
- 17b. The use of electronic security devices has increased in the last decade, hasn't it?

18a. The company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles was going bankrupt.

b. The company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles was going bankrupt, wasn't it?

However, if students begin unwittingly with the *ungrammatical* sentences 15 and 16, which I will repeat as 19a and 20a below, they are likely to produce unwittingly the *ungrammatical* tag-questions 19b and 20b:

19a. *The use of electronic security devices have increased in the last decade.

b. *The use of electronic security devices have increased in the last decade, haven't they?

20a. *The company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were going bankrupt.

b. *The company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were going bankrupt, weren't they?

In 19b, the pronoun *they* in the tag substitutes not for the subject *use* but incorrectly for *devices* (the object of the preposition *of*); in 20b, the pronoun *they* substitutes not for the subject *company* but apparently either for *offices* (the direct object of the relative clause) or for *New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (the compound objects of the preposition *in*).

The errors in forming the correct tag-question in 19 and 20 raise at least two important questions. First, do such errors mean that students do not really know how the Tag-Formation rule operates and, more specifically, do not know what the subjects of sentences are? The answer in both cases is no. Because of the greater length and complexity of declarative sentences 19a and, particularly, 20a, many writers—including sophisticated ones—will fall prey to errors in linguistic performance (not linguistic competence), more specifically, to limits of short-term memory. Producing the correct pronoun in the tag of a tag-question requires, among other things, holding the subject of the sentence in memory until the end of the sentence, a task which becomes more difficult as other constructions, particularly other noun phrases, increase the distance between the subject and the tag. (Instructors of writing can demonstrate to themselves and to their students that the underlying knowledge of subjects is still there with 19a and 20a by deleting the intervening constructions, changing the verbs *have increased* and *were going to increased* and *went*, respectively, and then having the students form the tag-questions.)

The second question is more pedagogical. If Tag-Formation does not always work in identifying subjects, particularly in long and complex sentences, is there some other means that writing instructors can use as a backup—or as an initial resource—to help students identify subjects? For example, let us say that a student has unwittingly produced the *ungrammatical* tag question in 19b and insists that *devices* is the subject of the sentence since that is what the *they* in the tag refers to. An instructor who recognizes that 19a and 19b are *ungrammatical* versions

of 17a and 17b, respectively, would insist just as strongly that the subject is *use*, not *devices*, since *use* is what *it* in the grammatical tag-question 17b refers to. Because the instructor and student apply the Tag-Formation rule to different declarative sentences—the student to 19a and the instructor to 17a—they end with different results. Is there any way to resolve the issue?

Fortunately, in such situations, instructors and their students can use as a resource another question formation rule of transformational-generative linguistics, namely, the Yes-No Question rule. This transformational rule, known implicitly by all native speakers of English, transforms declarative sentences to questions of the following form:

- 21a. The gambler could have lost all of his money already.
- b. Could the gambler have lost all of his money already?
- 22a. The witness whom the police believe was threatened refuses to testify.
- b. Does the witness whom the police believe was threatened refuse to testify?
- 23a. Yesterday afternoon, Martha bought a new stereo.
- b. Yesterday afternoon, did Martha buy a new stereo?
- 24a. My friends from Canada, Joseph and Sandy, have been thinking about moving to Florida.
- b. Have my friends from Canada, Joseph and Sandy, been thinking about moving to Florida?
- 25a. Although having a bad cold, the child is planning to go to the party.
- b. Although having a bad cold, is the child planning to go to the party?

As evidenced from the illustrative sentences above, the Yes-No Question rule moves the first auxiliary verb (if there is one) and verb tense of the main clause to the immediate left of the subject noun phrase. If no auxiliary verb occurs in the main clause, as in 22a and 23a, another transformational rule known as Do-Support inserts a *do* form to take the place of the “missing” auxiliary verb. Again, neither the Yes-No Question rule nor the Do-Support rule need be taught formally in the classroom since all native speakers of English not only know these rules already but constantly use them in daily speech to produce grammatical yes-no questions.

What is significant about the Yes-No Question rule for the problem at hand is that it specifically makes reference to the subject noun phrase of a sentence. This means that students can use the Yes-No Question rule as another means to identify subjects. Specifically, after the application of the Yes-No Question rule (and, if necessary, the Do-Support rule) to a declarative sentence, the subject of a sentence will be that noun phrase which occurs to the *immediate right* of the auxiliary verb (or the inserted *do* form if no auxiliary verb occurs). Given that it is the auxiliary verb that always undergoes the movement (and not the subject), the location of the subject can be stated in a somewhat unorthodox yet simpler fashion: the (simple) subject of a sentence is the noun (i.e., “person, place, or

thing") which stands to the nearest right of the word that has moved (or the nearest right of the *do* form if it has been inserted). Thus, in sentences 21-25, the subject nouns (of the main clauses) are, respectively, *gambler*, *witness*, *Martha*, *friends*, and *child*.

While identifying subjects with the Yes-No Question rule does have the disadvantage of instructors having to explain what a noun phrase or a noun is, the rule has some clear benefits. For one, the use of the rule can resolve the problem encountered earlier in determining the actual subject of the sentences in 17 and 19 and other similar sentences. If students transform the declarative sentences in 17a and 19a not into tag-questions but into yes-no questions, the resulting questions would be, respectively:

26. Has the use of electronic devices increased in the last decade?

27. *Have the use of electronic devices increased in the last decade?

Disregarding for the moment the ungrammaticality of 27, the application of the Yes-No Question rule here shows clearly that *use* and not *devices* is the actual subject of the sentence since *use* is the noun which stands to the nearest right of the moved auxiliary verb *have*. Transforming more complex sentences such as 18a and 20a results, respectively, in the following yes-no questions:

28. Was the company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles going bankrupt?

29. *Were the company which operated several branch offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles going bankrupt?

Here (again ignoring ungrammaticality), the application of the Yes-No Question rule shows that *company* is the subject, not *offices* nor the compound noun phrase *New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles*.

The Yes-No Question rule, however, provides a still greater benefit with respect to resolving the subject-verb agreement problem. Because the Yes-No Question rule places the verb which carries number agreement and the subject back to back, students can perceive more clearly if indeed the verb and its subject agree in number. Put in another way, because the Yes-No Question rule can radically shorten the distance between the subject and the number-carrying verb, students are less prone to performance errors, such as lapses in short-term memory. Thus, if given sentences 27 and 29, especially in contrast to sentences 26 and 28, students will more clearly see not only the ungrammaticality of sentences 27 and 29 but also the reason why.⁴ Again, none of this requires students to have prior schooling in grammar.

As with any method employed to attack persistent mechanical errors, the method of exploiting underlying syntactic knowledge has some drawbacks. It may not work in all cases in all dialects, and, obviously, it will not work for nonnative speakers of English, or at least, nonnative speakers with a weak command of the language. The method, however, does have some decided advantages. It works for most standard speakers of English; it requires no formal training in traditional or transformational-generative grammar (all an instructor needs are sample

sentences and fragments for demonstration purposes); it can be employed from the elementary school level to the college level; it can be used both in a classroom setting and in individual tutoring sessions (it can be taught very easily to student tutors); it can be expanded to include other matters of sentence mechanics (e.g., explaining and applying punctuation rules which make reference to independent and dependent clauses). Lastly, and perhaps most important at least for basic writers, the method develops not only self-reliance but also self-confidence because it emphasizes what students already know rather than what they do not. The method is, in other words, intuitive rather than theoretical. Indeed, if anything, the method brings to the surface the immense, often untapped (and often unappreciated), store of linguistic knowledge that students bring to the classroom everyday.

Notes

¹By the "standard" or "classical" model of transformational-generative grammar, I mean that model of language presented by Chomsky in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Those wishing a cogent history of the development and reception of transformational-generative linguistics in the United States can consult the two books by Newmeyer listed in the bibliography.

²For a classical version, see, for example, the formulation in Akmajian and Heny 1-11, 202-18. Further discussion and other treatments of Tag-Formation appear in Arbini; Huddleston; Cattel; and Culicover 131-43.

³I use the term "simplistic" deliberately here, for some notable exceptions do occur. For example, from the fragment "A nice day," we can derive "A nice day, isn't it?" However, instructors can utilize such examples to reinforce the idea that all tag-questions derive from underlying declarative sentences and not parts of them. By undoing the effects of Tag-Formation and other transformational rules (e.g., deleting the *-n't* and putting the copied elements of the tag back into their original positions), instructors can demonstrate that "A nice day, isn't it?" actually derives from "It is a nice day" (the underlying declarative sentence) and not from "A nice day" (a part of the underlying declarative sentence). The derivation of "A nice day, isn't it?" proceeds thus: "It is a nice day" (underlying declarative sentence) to "It is a nice day, isn't it?" (derived sentence after the Tag-Formation rule has applied) to "A nice day, isn't it?" (derived sentence after another rule has deleted *it* and *is* in the main clause). This derivation, incidentally, reveals an exception to the simplified description of the Tag-Formation rule given in the text. Tag-Formation also copies forms of the main verb *be* in the tag if these *be* forms have no accompanying first auxiliary verb (e.g., "Bill is happy, isn't he?" vs. "Bill could be happy, couldn't he?"). Another notable exception involves sentences like "I believe (that) John will go to Las Vegas," where the appropriate tag-question seems to be "I believe (that) John will go to Las Vegas, won't he?" rather than the expected "I believe (that) John will go to Las Vegas, don't I?" Yet, the fact that we can still derive an acceptable tag-question by copying elements from *within* the original

sentence suggests that, if not the whole sentence, at least the embedded clause (i.e., *John will go to Las Vegas*) is a sentence and not a fragment. Of interest here is that constructions like “I believe that....” (with *that* being unstressed) can serve as another test of “sentencehood” since only sentences (and not fragments) can be immediately embedded after them. To demonstrate this, the instructor might ask that students try to embed fragments like 5-8 immediately after “I believe that....” (Discerning readers may notice that the sequence “A nice day” cannot occur in this slot—hence, it is a fragment.) For a pragmatic explanation of why sentences containing cognition verbs (e.g., *believe*, *suppose*, *guess*) followed by an embedded clause behave differently in the formation of tag-questions, see Lakoff.

⁴As an added attraction, the Yes-No Question rule can be used to test for fragments, run-ons, and comma splices in the same way that the Tag-Formation rule can. This is so because the Yes-No Question rule, like the Tag-Formation rule, applies successfully only on bona fide sentences, not fragments, run-ons, or comma splices. Indeed, in many cases, the Yes-No Question rule may be an easier and more effective rule to use. I invite the reader to test these claims not only with the demonstration data given for the Tag-Formation rule but also with other word sequences in English. When teaching students how to test for fragments with the Yes-No Question rule, instructors should make clear that no new words may be added to suspect sequences except, if necessary, some form of *do* (i.e., *do*, *does*, or *did*).

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Janet R. Gilbert

PATTERNS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR BASIC WRITERS

Research in the language patterns that experienced writers use has now reached the point of providing useful suggestions for helping basic writing students achieve rapid and effective growth in writing. Shaughnessy, Hunt, Christensen, Williams, and the sentence combiners are among the many composition researchers and instructors who have observed that written English is different from spoken English, different enough for Shaughnessy to refer to "the 'dialect' of written formal English" (51). Basic writing students are normally competent users of oral language. In basic writing classes, discussions are intelligible, full of important ideas, at best even entertaining. But what goes wrong when these speakers write?

Some composition instructors might answer that basic writers often do not explore in enough depth the content they choose to write about, so they include the information that readers expect. Other instructors believe that basic writers have not learned to imagine their audiences. Others might add that clear writing requires basic writers to conceive a clear sense of their purposes for writing. While these answers offer insight into problems faced by basic writers, another variable is present. Once students have explored content, imagined audience, and defined the purpose, how should they use language when involved in the act of writing?

Basic writers must acquire the patterns—lexical and syntactic—that experienced writers use. Because these patterns can be identified, they can be taught. Because these patterns are not merely stylistic, but inherent to the time and space demands of writing, they should be taught. Teaching basic writers the specific, recurring patterns they need to par-

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ticipate in the dialect of writing opens possibilities for basic writers to select patterns consciously as they restructure their writing habits. In one student's words, "Previous to working with the patterns, I would write blindly going only on my instinct. Now as I write little light bulbs turn on inside my head as I begin to recognize language patterns." Conscious management of written patterns, even though this is only one dimension of writing growth, serves to adjust the habits of orality to the demands of literacy. To support this claim, I intend here (1) to review and interpret the results of six seldom-applied studies on the lexical and syntactic differences between spoken and written English and to refer to some widely recognized studies of language development that contain corresponding information, (2) to suggest focal points for teaching the patterns of writing to students who do not assimilate them through reading and writing alone, and (3) to demonstrate pattern use as identified by the research cited here in case studies of individual students and studies of class groups. In describing studies of class groups, I will also describe the instrument I have developed to measure patterns in writing, "the Lexigram."

In spite of awareness among composition researchers that orality and literacy are distinct forms of communication, few have systematically compared the lexicogrammar of spoken and written texts. As I have reviewed the work of those who have, I find that different studies have produced quite similar results. Consistently, some lexical and syntactic patterns appear more often in spoken texts, others in written texts. Although variations occur in definitions of language patterns and in methods of measurement used by researchers in different studies, I find the consistency in the results unobscured. From studies by Harrell, O'Donnell, Kroll, Cayer and Sacks, Gilbert, and Chafe, spanning three decades, I have compiled a list of the patterns found in writing. The common approach in all six studies was to compare spoken and written English texts, produced in each instance by the same subjects. The content, kinds of communicators and audiences, and purposes for communicating varied widely. This scope in data collection supports the position that the patterns found more frequently in written than in spoken texts were required as part of the act of writing itself. The list of language patterns appears in an Appendix to this essay.

In interpreting the information in the list and considering how it might be applied to the needs of basic writers, Bateson's perception of language processes provides a useful starting point: Language is a matter of naming and grouping (xxiv-v). The term *lexicogrammatical*, coined by Halliday, captures the same idea. Language is a combination of the words or names and the syntactic patterns or word groups that language users have available. In addition, Halliday's term implies interaction between the naming and grouping processes, an interaction that develops from the function the language is produced to serve.

Oral language is learned in natural settings where speakers are in close proximity and familiar with their listeners and the interactive circumstances. In such situations, speaking is inherently a paratactic act.

Speakers need not name precisely nor elaborate upon what their listeners perceive in their surroundings or already know from experiences shared with the speaker, so their word groups can be chunks or main clauses—*doer/doing* relationships with *where* and *when* (sometimes *how* or *why*) adverbs attached, usually in the form of prepositional phrases. Speakers, using paratactic language patterns, will string main clauses together as they receive additional information through their sense impressions. They do this either without judging the relative importance of the information at the time of utterance or by using intonation, facial expressions, or body language to signal import. Speakers often do not need the linguistic devices of extensive naming, extended coordination, subordination, relativization, or free modifiers. Describing the patterns of speech as closely linked to the physical environment and previous experiences does not suggest that speaking requires a more simple thinking process than writing, or is less fit to convey complicated ideas. Essentially, speaking is a more people-attuned process, less dependent than is writing upon purely linguistic means for communication. In some of the studies I cite above (especially those by O'Donnell and Chafe), the data show that even individuals who have become versatile users of language will retain some paratactic patterns when speaking. Basic writers, then, continue to write using the naming (lexical) and grouping (syntactic) patterns they acquired when they learned to speak. Consequently, in basic writing, subjects of sentences are almost always animate *doers* (often pronouns) or a substitute idiom (*it rained*), and strings of main clauses show up as run-on sentences.

Written language, instead of reflecting natural discourse in the way that oral language does, is produced in an artificial environment. Writing serves the purpose of extending communication through time and space. The naming and grouping in writing accommodate this function, making writing a hypotactic act that requires specialized language skills. The writer is alone, removed from both the action depicted and from an audience. Thus, the writer must use precise names, especially in subject position to establish a frame of reference for readers. The writer, distanced from any particular instance, can move readily from one instance to another, thus generalizing and abstracting. Nonanimate nouns in the subject slot of clauses facilitate abstractions. Many nonanimate nouns are converted verbs and adjectives—the nominalizations Williams has described. While Williams warns mature writers against too much nominalization and urges them to return to the human subject in sentences to achieve clarity and readability, most basic writers do not even use nominalizations.

Next, the writer needs to amplify precise names with descriptions—the pronominal adjective and relative clause from the list of written patterns I have compiled—in order to reconstruct the experiences to be shared with readers. In addition to precise naming and describing, the writer assigns significance to ideas, omitting some, while choosing others and ranking them. Thus, the writer is designing hierarchies of information, needing very much now the linguistic devices of extended coordina-

tion, subordination, and relativization. As soon as the less important or repeated ideas have been added, the writer can delete from the clauses that carry them by removing unnecessary subjects (often pronouns) and nonessential verbs (often *be*). Parts of coordinated and subordinated clauses may be deleted. Also through deletion, usually of relative clauses, the free modifier evolves. Essentially, free modifiers which retain a verb are participle phrases (i.e., Updike: "a clarinet *wandering* across like a crack on a pond" not "a clarinet *which was wandering* across like a crack on a pond"). The free modifiers which retain a complement noun or adjective are appositives (i.e., Bradbury: "It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, *a great evil god*" not "It towered thirty feet above half of the trees. *It looked like a great evil god*").¹ The research on spoken and written patterns indicates that free modifiers result from deletion rather than from chunking. This is the case because writers are obligated to set up sentences so missing words can be accounted for by readers, whereas speakers may compensate for any lack of understanding among listeners with more chunks or even gestures. Finally, writers may choose to move free modifiers within a sentence to express a focus. Free modifiers, and also adverbial subordinate clauses and relative clauses, in the writing of students who are not familiar with the patterns often become unintended sentence fragments.

While each student will develop individual pattern use, characteristically, basic writers do not use nonanimate nouns to name subjects of sentences precisely and do not use the hypotactic word grouping techniques of extended coordination, subordination, relativization, or deletion to free modifiers. Whether used abundantly or sparingly to conform to the requirements of content, purpose, or style, these are the patterns of writing which students must acquire as they become writers.

Thomas Farrell, from his work with ghetto students, has reached a similar conclusion: "In short, the movement from the oral state of mind to the literate involves a radical transformation of cognitive capacities and this transformation is effected . . . by learning certain linguistic practices" (479). The linguistic practices for naming and grouping in written English appear to be acquired for the most part unconsciously by fluent writers, but not by basic writers. However, the evidence from case and class studies in the third section of this article demonstrates that writing patterns can be acquired consciously by most basic writers. I believe composition instructors can open possibilities for basic writers by directly teaching writing patterns and the options among them.

The foregoing speaking/writing data combined with the information on acquisition of written language can be viewed as the basis for a developmental description of written language, a rationale for teaching the language of writing. If my reference to language patterns recalls for readers experiences with sentence combining, such a rationale was primarily what sentence combining lacked. When sentence combining was introduced to writing students without rhetorical purpose, the word play eventually degenerated into exercises without meaning for either students or teachers. In the same way, the study of traditional grammar

—especially of errors—has become meaningless apart from the context of a piece of writing and more significant goals for the development of the writer. If instruction in written language pattern may one day be soundly based on a developmental description of language, how should instruction in the patterns be incorporated into the larger design for composition instruction?

Procedures for direct instruction in the patterns of writing must vary for individual teachers and individual students. It is my purpose in this essay to discuss and illustrate the research on written language patterns rather than the procedures for teaching these patterns. Nevertheless, I would like to set the frame of reference for the case and class studies with five focal points for instruction. I found these procedures helped make learning the patterns of writing useful for the basic writers whose language development is described in the studies.

The affective environment in a basic writing classroom is always of first concern. A writing classroom should be a community of learners who feel free to cultivate their ideas for writing with each other and then share their written products in various stages of development. In such a group, language must be discussed in terms of its functions and effective use, not its correctness or incorrectness. Basic writers must come to feel that they own their language, that their language comes from them rather than being imposed upon them. Often basic writers are just beginning to move in their thinking from fact collection to analysis, synthesis, evaluation. The comfort zone in the classroom must support this growth. My personal preference is to make assignments that require students consciously to shift back and forth between narrative and analytical discourse forms, while selecting their own content.

Second, basic writers need to begin to reason about how language works. They are receptive to discovering that there is a system in language, that differences exist between oral and written patterns, that writers move through predictable stages in the acquisition of language. Basic writers are often familiar with systems in numbers, automobile engines, computers and business machines, assembly lines, food processing, merchandising, even athletic competition. Many students, like the one I quoted in the introduction to this essay, are relieved to discover there is a system through which they can approach written language. I recommend individual conferences, built into class time when possible, to help students begin to recognize the pattern habits in their own writing and apply the system in written language to bring about the changes they seek in their own styles.

Third, the patterns that have been introduced or discovered must be applied in student writing. I have found the best course for teaching written language patterns to be a five-hour course. A longer course might be better. One-third of the class time is allocated to working with the patterns, one-third is spent discussing ideas and styles from reading assignments, the final third is devoted to preparing and sharing writing. Patterns are practiced and examined in class through sentences that students produce. Students are then expected to use the patterns again,

as needed, in the papers they write. In my opinion, exercises, drills, or workbooks are not acceptable methods for working with language patterns. The “action” is in what the students can produce on their own.

Fourth, as students learn more about the pattern choices they have as writers, they need to learn less about the errors that might occur. When students try patterns that are unfamiliar to them, errors often increase. As pattern use continues, errors decrease and pattern application becomes increasingly appropriate. When a student cannot master a pattern without errors, this is usually a signal that a pattern that precedes it in the language acquisition sequence has not been mastered. For example, students who have not mastered relative clauses often cannot produce participle phrases without errors.

Fifth, I mention above a rationale for teaching the language of writing; by this I mean reasons for selecting which patterns to teach. Writing students can be taught to rely upon the recurring patterns and accept the irregularities as idioms. Only grammarians, not writers, need to identify every word in a sentence. Teaching the patterns begins with the *doer/doing* relationship in the clause—subject and verb—not with the parts of speech which are static. I teach students to become aware of and use effectively the subject, verb, and complement slots in clauses, then to build sentences by adding modifiers around these base parts as needed. Most basic writers are delighted to learn that there are only a limited number of modifiers—the exact number depending on how the modifier patterns are defined. Currently I identify eight modifiers and ask students to practice the ones they are not using. Writers gain nothing from practicing patterns they are already using adequately as speakers—usually noun clauses, infinitives, *where* and *when* adverbs, even single-word adjectives. Still, although most basic writers are comfortable using prepositional phrases, this is a useful pattern to emphasize because experienced writers use many more than do students. Also, I ask basic writers to use more nonanimate nouns in the subject slot of sentences, prepositional phrases, adverbial subordinate clauses, relative clauses, participle phrases, and appositives. Most of all, I ask them to use these patterns in the context of communicating their ideas.

Wendy and Ed—first year students in an open-door community college at the time they wrote the material presented here—were instructed using the procedures I have outlined. I have selected the work of these students as representing different levels of pattern acquisition. Wendy’s writing was paratactic. She needed to learn first to coordinate, especially clause parts, and then to subordinate. Ed’s writing was already becoming hypotactic. He needed to refine the subordinate clause and acquire the relative clause. Then he was able to move quickly to deleting to free modifiers and to some nominalizing. The samples below, each approximately 200 words (except Wendy’s pre-course writing) show the patterns that Wendy and Ed learned to use more frequently from their pre-course to their post-course writing.

Besides the increased frequency of written patterns, two more observations can be made from the following samples. First, many kinds of

errors decreased even though the students studied patterns, not errors. The error reduction can reasonably be attributed to increased pattern mastery because no essay was revised after an instructor responded to it.

Second, the *shared sayings*² that basic writers often rely upon are conspicuous in these samples. I define the shared saying as a word group in widespread use that student writers have acquired in the same way they learn single words—through repetition. The relative clauses in *everything that I've always wanted* or *the best time we've ever had* are no more produced by individual students than are the participles in the phrases *chewing gum*, *towering trees*, or *Scotch-guarded car seats*. These syntactic units are repeated by all of us until they are *stiff as a board* or *old as the hills*, even though many are not conspicuous enough to call attention to themselves as trite phrases. Nevertheless, such word groups are certainly a reiteration of shared experiences—shared sayings. Thus, a student who has not mastered a pattern may produce it on occasion in writing, having acquired it as a shared saying. Increased specificity of content within a pattern becomes a clue that reveals the pattern was actually produced by the student writer in order to manage the content at hand. The combined measures of the effectiveness of instruction in the patterns of writing are increased frequency in the use of writing patterns, reduced errors when varied patterns are employed, and increasingly specific content and appropriateness in the patterns produced.

Wendy's pre-course writing followed her speaking patterns: strings of main clauses modified largely by prepositional phrases telling *where* and *when*, and animate *doers* or *it* in the subject slot of clauses.

Wendy's pre-course writing: personal essay

- 1 Today is a very good day. I had my favorite class first hour
- 2 it was phisical phittness, I also like the teachure alot hes Mr.
- 3 Prentiss. I worked last night untill one thirtey, it was hard get-
- 4 ting up at eight o clock in the morning. It was sixtey degrees
- 5 out today Very nice not to hot not to cold. We had a test in
- 6 my Phisical Phitness class and I did very good. I half to work
- 7 very hard at my Basic math class, Im not very good in math.
- 8 Tonight I half to work five o clock until nine o clock I hope
- 9 it goes by very fast. Well I hope you have a good day, I plan to.

In this pre-course sample, Wendy has coordinated clauses and placed a nonanimate noun in subject position only once while she used no adverbial subordinate clauses and no relative clauses. If *Very nice not to hot not to cold* (line 5) could be considered a free modifier, immediately it can be recognized as a shared saying. Wendy has used two *that* clauses (line 9) in the complement slot and the infinitive *to work* (lines 6 and 8) twice in the same position. From the data that compared patterns in spoken and written texts, *that* and *to* complements appeared as often in speaking as in writing. This kind of clause juncture may resemble coordination more closely than subordination, at least from the perspective

of language acquisition. One of Wendy's complement clauses in *I hope you have a good day* (line 9) is, of course, the classic shared saying.

Wendy's post-course writing: personal essay

1 The Autumn woods on a morning in October is very beautiful,
2 interesting, and offers very healthy exercise if you take time
3 to enjoy it. At this time of the day the woods is noisy with
4 the sounds of squirrels and chipmunks moving around getting
5 their work done before the snow falls. Overhead you can see
6 flocks of birds chirping while they fly south to their winter
7 homes. Walking along you may start to get wet from the frost,
8 melting on the leaves. We have walked about a mile, and now
9 we are just about finished. Your heart is beating faster now,
10 and your lungs expand faster from the brisk walk. You can feel
11 the muscles in your legs are tired from the walk, but it's a very
12 enjoyable way of getting exercise. The walk is over with and
13 it's time to leave the colorful woods. Getting into your car and
14 driving away you feel good about seeing the beautiful colors
15 of the woods and the pleasant way of getting exercise.

Rhetorically, Wendy's post-course writing became more colorful because she included more details. Her organization was chronological and her narrative focused upon the idea of pleasant exercise out-of-doors. In terms of writing patterns, Wendy began to coordinate more skillfully, now also coordinating parts of clauses as well as complete main clauses. She used three adverbial subordinate clauses—two *when* clauses (lines 5-6) and one *if* clause (lines 2-3). It appears that she became comfortable enough with subordination to delete two introductory subordinate *when* clauses—*Walking along* (line 7) and *Getting into your car and driving away* (lines 13-14).

Many of the details Wendy added to this piece of writing were introduced in prepositional phrases, a pattern she had come to recognize. While her pre-course writing contained eight *where* and *when* prepositional phrases in end-of-sentence position, her post-course writing contained 19 in varied positions, including 5 that carried *how* and *why* information.

In naming, while Wendy wrote in the second person which worked well for her narrative, she now used eight animate and eight nonanimate subjects; she could vary the content in the subject slot and at the same time use a greater selection of active verbs. Wendy was not ready for and did not receive instruction in nominalization. I think it is fascinating to observe Wendy change the function of the verb *get* from deleted clauses *Getting into your car* (line 13) and *getting there work done* (lines 4-5) to nominalization of *getting* (lines 12 and 15). In my opinion, such play on this single verb may indicate that basic writers initiate syntactic growth around a limited number of lexical items.

Wendy also used five participles or participle phrases that postmodified nouns in object positions: *of squirrels and chipmunks moving around/getting there work/done* (lines 4-5), *of birds chirping* (line 6), *from the frost melting, on the leaves* (lines 7-8). I would like to claim that since Wendy had studied deleting relative clauses to participle phrases, she could now produce free modifiers. I do not think this is so, however, because Wendy did not spontaneously use the relative clause at all. Thus, she was probably not ready to master that pattern or its deletion. A possible explanation is that Wendy could have produced and deleted subordinate clauses as she did in lines 4-5 (*of squirrels and chipmunks/while they were/moving around and getting there work done*). Another possibility is that Wendy's participles can all be explained as shared sayings. She could have become conscious of *-ing* words in class and simply used all she could, but this is not the same as learning to produce a pattern independently, although it could be a first step. Wendy's work offers a strong argument, I believe, for teaching students at their levels of readiness and for helping them conceptualize the patterns they are expected to produce.

Ed's pre-course writing showed use of more patterns than Wendy's, but a lack of control of the patterns he attempted.

Ed's pre-course writing: personal essay

1 He lives near a beautiful river; in the Northern Forest's of
 2 Michigan. Where the Mighty Oaks loom overhead. Where the
 3 ferns grow, green and bushy. Where the sounds of the forest
 4 echoes its' song. Its' a place where, the wisdom of the wild,
 5 is something to be experienced.

6 My father, and him go fishing every day. To see him there
 7 proud, and fierce the awesome power, but still beautifully
 8 graceful. His speed is unmatched by anything in the forest, but
 9 he's a shy and gentel creature. Always loyal, and there when
 10 I need him, yet said to be the worlds most ferocious dog. The
 11 second largest breed of hound, a Russian Wolfhound, or Borzoi.

12 He's smart, for a dog almost to smart for his own good. He's
 13 one of the moodiest dogs I've ever seen, and very emotional
 14 in his own way. Sometimes he gets so mad; he won't look at
 15 me, he will look the other way. He can be stubborn as a mule,
 16 and won't move no matter what, and you can't drag him. He
 17 will stiffen up like a board, and won't move until you leave
 18 him alone.

19 He's not like other dogs; he doesn't pester you all the time. He
 20 leaves you alone, and expects the same from you. He reminds
 21 me of Mister Spock, from the series Star Trek, he tries to hide
 22 his emotions, for this reason he's easy to take for granted.

In this pre-writing, Ed has coordinated clauses and parts of clauses.

In addition, he has used adverbial subordinate clauses—three *where* clauses (lines 2, 2-3, 3) and two *when* clauses (lines 9 and 17). However, his punctuation shows that he is still uncertain of what constitutes a sentence.

Ed used two word groups that could be considered comparative clauses in the third paragraph, *stubborn as a mule* (line 15) and *stiffen up like a board* (line 17). He also used one relative clause, (*that*) *I've ever seen* (line 13). The comparative clauses clearly belong to our national stockpile of shared sayings; the relative clause is also a shared saying, although not as distinctive and, therefore, not as easy to recognize as such. The clause Ed used in lines 4-5, *a place where, the wisdom of the wild, is something to be experienced*, must be noted separately because although it contains adverbial information, it can be classified as a relative clause. Thus, in terms of building hierarchies in language, Ed in his pre-course writing was using extended coordination and subordination, but only beginning to try the relative clause.

Even though Ed was not producing relative clauses freely in his pre-course writing, he did use two appositives and one postmodifier participle phrase. Ed used the appositives *a Russian Wolfhound, or Borzoi* (line 11) and *for a dog almost to smart for his own good* (line 12). He used the postmodifier participle phrase *said to be* (line 10). These instances, too, sound more like shared sayings than Ed's individual voice.

From Ed's post-course writing, I have selected two short excerpts from narrative and analytical discourse—which together equal his pre-course writing in length—in order to illustrate how written patterns vary and how they are consistent across genres.

Ed's post-course writing 1: narrative

- 1 After eight hours on an airplane, we were loaded on buses that
- 2 were bound for the pier. As we weaved down narrow streets,
- 3 I would catch a glimpse of it everytime that we passed a va-
- 4 cant lot. I had seen it from the air when we circled to land
- 5 and now I was there standing on the pier right next to it, the
- 6 U.S.S. Nimitz. It was the world's largest nuclear-powered
- 7 aircraft-carrier, one thousand feet from stem to stern, a massive
- 8 gray hulk of steel which cast an ominous shadow on whoever
- 9 dared to approach.
- 10 I stood there and felt somewhat humbled by this giant beast
- 11 as it stood there ready for any task asked of it. It made us feel
- 12 insignificant, like ants at the base of the mound. We could sense
- 13 the awesome destructive power hidden within.

Ed's post-course writing 2: analytical essay

14 Genetic Engineering, the new era of feast or famine, and with
15 it comes the renewed promise of eliminating human suffering.
16 This is the scientific and medical communities' latest effort to
17 inflict a new cure upon us. What worries me about genetic
18 engineering is our past record of problem solving. It seems to
19 me that everytime we solve a problem we inadvertently create
20 two new ones.

21 However, I must agree that all the possibilities associated with
22 genetic alterations should be looked at with the hope of cor-
23 recting some genetic disorders. I think we have a moral obliga-
24 tion to explore all our options as long as we don't use humans
25 as guinea pigs.

In his post-course writing, Ed has strengthened his control of coordination, and of adverbial subordination. Of special note, he has extended his use of relativization. Ed used four relative clauses in these excerpts from his narrative—*that were bound for the pier* (lines 1-2), *that we passed a vacant lot* (lines 3-4), and *which cast an ominous shadow* (line 8); from his analytical essay—*(that) we solve a problem* (line 19). I can hypothesize that Ed produced most of these relative clauses instead of merely repeating shared sayings because he used more of them and because they contain more content-specific words than the relative clause from his pre-writing, *(that) I've ever seen*. Interestingly, two of these relative clauses are built upon adverbial information and modify the same word *everytime*. As with Wendy's *getting*, this suggests the lexicogrammatical nature of pattern acquisition and may show a transition stage from subordination to relativization.

Ed also demonstrated increased use of deleted patterns. In his narrative Ed produced three appositives—*the U.S.S. Nimitz* (line 6), *one thousand feet from stem to stern* (line 7), and *a massive gray hulk of steel* (lines 7-8). I consider these more representative of Ed's own voice than the appositive in his analytical essay, *the new era of feast or famine* (line 14), which probably came from a source Ed had been reading about genetic engineering. I question analysis on all pieces of student writing that might have been influenced by outside sources because, with no plagiarism involved, short word groups are as easy to shift from one piece of writing to another as single words.

Three participle phrases appear in this excerpt from Ed's narrative—*there standing on the pier* (line 5),³ *task asked of it* (line 11), and *power hidden within* (line 13)—and one appears in the lines from his analytical essay—*possibilities associated with genetic alterations* (lines 21-22). Again, both the increased frequency in Ed's use of the participle phrase and the increased specificity of content within most of the phrases indicate that he probably produced some of the word groups by deleting his own clauses.

Ed's growth in naming is also quite interesting. In his pre-course writing, Ed used more than three times as many animate as nonanimate words in the subject position of clauses. In his post-course narrative, Ed used exactly twice as many animate as nonanimate subjects, but in his post-course analytical writing, he used one less animate than nonanimate subject. Thus, while Ed developed in the use of the nonanimate subject in both kinds of writing, he needed nonanimate subjects more often in his analytical writing.

Overall, during his composition course, Ed's pattern use became increasingly hypotactic, his errors of all kinds decreased with no intervention by an instructor, and his syntactic groups included more content-specific names. Because Ed began his composition course at a higher level of language skill than did Wendy, he, more than Wendy, was able to leave the course in more comfortable control of all the patterns he would need as a writer.

Ed and Wendy are only two basic writing students, but their writing pattern acquisition is typical of that of students in over a hundred case studies that I have completed during a five-year period. The written pattern acquisition of each student has individual characteristics that vary with that student's personality and learning style, but the common characteristics are consistent with the data from the speaking/writing and language development research I have cited.

Recent case studies have been made more efficient by the use of an instrument which I have developed and called the Lexigram.⁴ Its name is derived from the term for Halliday's concept. It measures key patterns of writing. This instrument, while still in an early stage of development, has made possible the analysis of written pattern use not just for individual students, but for small class groups. I have applied the Lexigram to 200-word samples of comparable pre-course and post-course writing by college composition students who write like Ed and Wendy.

The Lexigram measures five lexicogrammatical patterns that from the research I cite, and from early case studies, seem to be the clearest signals of writing competency: (1) nonanimate noun in subject position, (2) relative clause, (3) participle phrase, (4) appositive, and (5) series of prepositional phrases—three or more. The guidelines for the Lexigram have been developed so that not only frequency, but also correct use and content-specific use (to the extent possible) have been included in the measure. The five patterns are varied enough to apply equally well to different genres—for example, while more nonanimate subjects often appear in analytical than in narrative writing, the reverse is often true for participle phrases. Likewise, nominalizations may be offset by relative clauses.

In a 200-word sample, most writers will produce from one to fifteen instances of the patterns measured by the Lexigram. Wendy, for example, received a score of 2 on the Lexigram for her pre-course writing and a score of 9 in her post-course writing, showing she had increased her instances of pattern use during one semester by 7. Ed scored 5 in his pre-course writing and 14 post-course, showing an increase of 9. Writers

who score between 0 and 5 are described using the Lexigram as being on Level I of writing development, writers between 6 and 10 on Level II, and writers from 11 to 15+ on Level III. Level III is competent writing. *Competent* is a more appropriate term than *good* here in that *competent* describes writing that demonstrates the skills to perform the task required, while *good* applied to writing suggests insight and imagination that may or may not accompany competency.

The Lexigram was applied to nine members of a community college composition class⁵—four students whose pre-course writing received scores on Level I, four students on Level II, and one student on Level III. As had Wendy and Ed in other classes, these students were instructed in writing patterns as I have described. The average increase in frequency of pattern use of all nine students in their post-course writing was 4.37. The students on Level I showed the greatest average increase of 5.75 instances of pattern use for their semester's work; those on Level II showed an increase of 4; the student on Level III showed no change.

Was it necessary for the basic writers in the class to receive instruction in patterns of writing, or could the students have developed in their use of writing patterns merely by writing often and revising well? To address this question, students from a similar composition class were instructed by means of frequent writing assignments and revision techniques, but without any direct instruction in writing patterns. Of nine members randomly selected from this class, two students received scores on Level I in their pre-course writing and seven received scores of Level II. The average increase in frequency of pattern use for these students in their post-writing was .71, far below the 4.37 average increase of the group that had been instructed in writing patterns. In this second class, the students on Level I showed an increase of 1 more instance of pattern use as a result of their semester of writing; the students on Level II showed an average decrease of .29. I can hypothesize from these results that direct instruction in the patterns of writing made the difference and made more difference for basic writers.

Another class group must be mentioned. Nine community college students from a third class received instruction in the patterns of writing, but these students were enrolled in a two-hour course and were not asked to write frequently during the semester. In this group, six students received a score on Level I on their pre-course writing, and three received a score on Level II. The average increase in frequency of pattern use for all students in this class on their post-course writing was 3.16, the Level I writers increasing an average of 4.33 instances of pattern use, the Level II writers an average of 2. Thus, even when students were taught and did learn the patterns they needed as writers, they did not acquire the patterns as successfully without frequent writing opportunities—compared to the students asked to repeatedly apply their learning about language in their own writing.

The above data, although the number of students measured is yet small, indicate that students who receive direct instruction in the patterns and who write frequently assimilate the patterns best. Another

question remains: Does teaching the patterns of writing help students produce writing that is *generally* considered good? Thinking about this question would be limited by accepting one instructor's or even one faculty's standards for good writing. The Bedford-prizewinning essays, written by students from many institutions on diverse subjects for varied purposes and evaluated by 39 screeners and eight judges from many institutions, provide one representative standard for good writing. When the Lexigram was used on ten randomly selected 200-word samples from the prizewinning essays, all ten writers scored on Level III with a frequency of pattern use ranging from 11 to 20. The mean pattern use in these samples of writing is 14.62. In contrast, the mean pattern use in the pre-writing of my most recent basic writing class of 18 students is 3.11.

Although there is still much to learn about describing and measuring development of written language, research into the lexicogrammar of spoken and written English and on language acquisition has accumulated to the point where results can be applied to instruction for basic writers. Lexical and syntactic patterns that basic writers must acquire in order to become competent writers have been identified, at least in part, and can be incorporated into a rationale for teaching the language of writing. We can begin to see, in Shaughnessy's words, "what lies below the prescriptive bits and pieces of instruction" (292). Basic writers who learn to consciously manage written patterns become better writers. Composition instruction can open possibilities for basic writers when it leads students to explore ideas, anticipate purposes for writing and cultural expectations of audiences, and, in addition, manage written language articulately.

APPENDIX

Language Patterns Appearing in Writing

Patterns Appearing More Frequently in Written than in Spoken Texts in All Six Studies or in All Studies in Which the Researchers Selected the Pattern to Measure

- Nominalizations
- Prenominal adjectives
- Relative clauses
- Participle phrases
- Total subordinate clauses

Patterns Appearing More Frequently in Written than in Spoken Texts in More than One Study

- Nonanimate nouns in subject position
- Gerunds as a separate form of nominalization or nonanimate noun
- Appositives
- Absolutes as a separate form of participle phrase
- Conjoined phrases (i.e., verb phrases, adjective phrases, or noun phrases)
- Sequences of prepositional phrases
- Prepositional phrases that are postmodifiers of nouns
- Ellipsis, often accompanying conjoining (Meaning is retained within a deleted clause as contrasted with a chunk in speaking which may not have been produced as a clause.)
- How* and *why* adverbs (single words, infinitives, prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses)
- Passive voice verbs
- Perfect tense verbs
- Locus of complexity distributed between subject and predicate (More complicated patterns located in subject as well as in predicate.)
- More and longer T-units

Patterns in Which There Were No Differences or Only Slight Differences between Spoken and Written Texts in More than One Study

- Infinitives
- Complement clauses (*that* and *to* clauses)
- Where* adverbs (as single words, prepositional phrases)
- Be* verb clauses
- Progressive verbs

Notes

¹Hunt observed that appositives appeared frequently in the writing of students in grade 8, while participle phrases did not appear frequently until writers were beyond grade 12. Appositives may well be produced by writers in two ways—by deleting coordination and by deleting relativization.

²Bartholomae uses the term *commonplace* to describe what I think is a similar observation. However, he intends *commonplace* to emphasize the cultural dimension of oft-repeated ideas. I intend *shared sayings* to emphasize the lexicogrammatical dimension.

³In Ed's clause *I was there standing on the pier, was standing* could be the complete verb. I prefer to describe *was* as the verb that links the adverb *there* to the subject and *standing on the pier* as a participle phrase because I think this explanation captures the writer's intent. I realize, however, that this is a subjective choice.

⁴The Lexigram was developed under a grant to Delta College, "Improving Retention through Assessment," Title III, US Department of Education, G008541212.

⁵The class members whose writing is included in these figures are the ones who produced sets of texts that met the requirements of the study: pre- and post-course texts of adequate length of comparable genre, and free from possible intervention by outside sources.

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Donna Gorrell

FREEDOM TO WRITE— THROUGH IMITATION

Imitation watchers have been noting with satisfaction a resurgence of interest in that ancient practice of observing and replicating the writing of others as a means of internalizing a sense of written language. Whether their approach is process-oriented, cognitive-based, rhetorical, or any combination, many teachers are using imitation in their classrooms, finding it to be effective in teaching form and sense of language while encouraging rather than stifling creativity. It is in fact part of the writing process. For writers imitate other writers, just as surely as painters imitate other painters, violinists imitate other violinists, golfers imitate other golfers. It's one of the ways beginners learn how it's done.

Unskilled writers do not have a clear sense of form. For them that sense is all mixed up with jumbled, half-remembered rules, unsuccessful trials at writing, heavily marked papers, and insufficient and ineffectual reading. When basic writers come to the college writing program, most of them have had very little experience with writing, and they have been singularly unsuccessful in applying the rules of grammar to their writing. Because they lack a sense of form at all levels—word, sentence, paragraph, and entire work—their ideas are thwarted. They think more about form than about what they want to say. Compared to skilled writers, for whom a sense of form is almost unconscious, basic writers spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking about how to spell their words and phrase their sentences. In the process, ideas get lost.

One solution often suggested is to disregard form in order to encourage the free expression of ideas. Through free writing, unskilled writers often

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become fluent writers—but they are still unskilled. At some point, if their writing is ever to go to an audience beyond their supportive teacher and classmates, they must learn to phrase their ideas in sentences structured like those written conventionally. Their paragraphs and essays will need to be unified, coherent, and complete.

Imitation offers a way for unskilled writers to learn form and structure while generating and finding expression for their own ideas. Imitation can assist them in learning to shape their sentences, develop their paragraphs, express their own voices, and perform many of the complicated tasks that the writing process involves. Imitation, I suggest, is part of the processes of writing and learning to write; it frees creativity rather than stifling it, and its specific practices can be taught.

Acknowledging that psychologists still do not fully understand the nature of the developmental changes that occur in imitation, Yando, Seitz, and Zigler take the position that imitation is “built into the human species much as language appears to be built in” (4). As children must be taught a specific language but apparently do not need to be taught how to learn a language, so they need not be taught how to imitate even though specific imitative acts may be taught (5). Like language, imitation is used both for communication and for learning and is an indisputable means for increasing problem-solving competence (15).

Piaget rejects the notion that imitation is an innate ability, claiming, “The child learns to imitate.” At the same time, Piaget describes a “tendency” to imitate that is transmitted through heredity and assists acquired “techniques” that make learning possible (5). With use, imitated forms become internalized, incorporated into cognitive structures. By the act of imitating, the learner interiorizes the model, causing the formation of images (77). The image, or interiorized imitation, then “acquires a life of its own” (75), so that the person who imitates is “often unaware that he is doing so” (75).

Throughout the writing process, writers refer to their internalized representation of what writing looks like. When writers read, they pick up not only meaning but also the way in which that meaning is expressed. In the words of Smith, they “read like a writer” (562). Writers notice how other writers phrase sentences, choose vocabulary within those sentences, shape paragraphs. They develop a sense of the idiom of written style, and when they write they produce a similar idiom, utilizing similar ways of putting words and phrases and sentences together. Most of the time this process of assimilation and imitation is unconscious; if asked why a sentence is phrased in a particular way, a writer would most likely not attribute the reason to something he or she had read.

Many teachers who stress free expression over form have reservations about using imitation for teaching writing. They fear that the model will become a pointless end in itself. They are afraid that, if their students are asked to ape someone else’s style, creativity will suffer, thought will be subordinate to form, and the act of imitating will not transfer to other writing tasks. Such instructors see imitation as being product-oriented when attention needs to be given to the process.

My position is that form and meaning develop hand in hand, that attention to form is part of the process of generating and expressing ideas, informing and aiding writing at all stages. Attention to form aids invention, it promotes the satisfaction of knowing how to put words down on paper, it assists revision and editing. As to transfer to other writing, the imitation of particular written sentences, paragraphs, and larger pieces is no more restricting than the imitation of spoken sentences in first-language learning. On the flexibility gained from internalizing models, Corbett states: "It is that internalization of structures that unlocks our powers and sets us free to be creative, original, and ultimately effective. *Imitate that you may be different*" [italics his] ("Theory and Practice" 250).

D'Angelo states the paradox this way: "Imitation exists for the sake of variation. The student writer will become more original as he engages in creative imitation" (283). Juxtaposing imitation and invention, he conceives of imitation as "the process whereby the writer participates not in stereotypes, but in archetypal forms and ideas" (283). Imitation can be viewed as a shortcut to learning new styles and structures, giving the learner a wider choice among alternatives for expressing individual ideas.

One of the primary functions of imitation is its problem-solving capacity. It makes use of experience—one's own and that of others—to find solutions. Applied to writing, imitation means that we do not need to invent a new form every time we want to express an idea. Trial-and-error writing depends too much on reinventing the wheel. Much more efficient is to ask: How has this problem been solved before? What are some of the possible ways of stating this idea? How have other people reported their research? How do other people write clear instructions?

Basic writers, who so often have not internalized the modes of expression required for writing to a formal audience, have their flow of ideas halted in the absence of a form for expressing them. Because of deficient reading and writing backgrounds, they refer to inadequate internalized models as they try to proceed with the writing. This block to expression results directly from their struggle with form. Imitation can enter the process in an enabling, heuristic function.

It is enabling when the internalized form derived from reading and writing experience provides a structure for the expression of ideas, showing in what ways such ideas have been expressed to similar audiences before. It is heuristic when it serves as the vehicle for development of ideas. "Form is heuristic," says Coe, "for it guides a structured search. Faced with the emptiness of a form, a human being seeks matter to fill it" (18).

Imitation is not plagiarism, nor is it slavish attention to "how it's done." Originals and copies exist side by side quite reputably in our world. Witness fashions—in clothing, automobiles, home appliances. In fact, as Gere observes, originals exist to be imitated, and the very term "original" implies the possibility of imitations. Originals, she notes, are both models of how something can be done and challenges for improve-

ment. The creator of an imitation competes with the original, trying to improve on it.

Imitation has been successfully taught. Using what he calls "the simple yet powerful idea that we could teach students to write by examining how real writers write," Gray developed an approach for teaching the cumulative sentence (185). His students examine numerous examples of cumulative sentences written by professional writers, noting salient features, being led "to 'see' what they too have seen but not noticed before" (188). Then they imitate the methods of modification employed by the professionals. Finally, "students apply these now-familiar structures by writing longer, extended sequences" (186). As a result of this practice, his students become "secure in the knowledge of what they can do. Their use of cumulative structures is now natural and intuitive, and they write with a mature and easy style" (202).

Another form of imitation that is often effective with inexperienced writers is exact sentence imitation. This approach begins with a model sentence, illustrates and explains the structural pattern of that sentence, presents a sentence that imitates that pattern, and then requires the student first to copy the model exactly and then to write an imitation of it. In this way, beginning writers learn how to use unfamiliar syntactic structures and conventions of punctuation. I have taught students to recognize and avoid sentence fragments by requiring that they write them intentionally, mimicking those written by professional writers. And students can learn to use semicolons in compound sentences, not by the usual method of correcting errors but by composing sentences from models that utilize those structures (Gorrell, *Bridges* 3).

Controlled composition is another type of imitation that I have used for enabling inexperienced writers to take an upward step to new levels of performance. Students copy passages while at the same time altering them syntactically or semantically. A passage may be rewritten from first person singular to third, from past tense to present, from passive voice to active, and so on. By rewriting the passage, students practice not only the targeted features but all the related ones as well (Gorrell, *Copy/Write*). They write generally correct sentences and practice forms they have been using ineptly or not at all. Through this practice, they concentrate not on errors but on correct writing, internalizing written language.

Brooks uses the "persona paraphrase" to teach variety and style. She selects a passage of prose that illustrates a structure she wants to teach—like parenthetical expression, modification, or parallelism. Distributing copies of the passage, she reads it and guides her class to an awareness of what makes the passage work—main stylistic features, syntactic features, "particular little tricks" (215). Then the students in her classes copy the structure of the passage, phrase by phrase and sentence by sentence, substituting a completely different subject matter (214-15). She sees a distinct improvement in style:

The structure of the paraphrase, rather than limiting student imagination, provides the crutch that makes it possible for him to give his imagination free rein, without the worry about how to finish a sentence he has once started. The paraphrase, since it is such a close copy structurally of a polished original, rarely shows any mechanical errors. . . . Almost inevitably the next formal essay he writes will contain some turn of phrase, some sentence structure that he has "learned" from his model. (216)

Imitation is effective beyond the sentence level. Many college freshmen don't know what a well-wrought essay looks like. They may, in fact, be already practicing a type of imitation, patterning their own immature writing or that of other unskilled student writers. When students have no clear sense of what they're striving for, they need an exemplary model, a guide, a shortcut through endless trials and errors. The model can be either professional or effective student writing, but its structure and method of development must be evident and attainable.

In presenting a model essay, the teacher must attend to its distinctive features (Bandura 136). Discussion may center on the clarity of the thesis statement and its focusing and cohesive effects on the essay. Or the model may be a particularly apt representation of paragraph unity or interparagraph coherence. Students given a model essay within their range of ability are likely to produce a comparable piece of writing that is carefully organized, clearly expresses its controlling idea, and uses specific details and concrete words to support that idea. In short, they produce whatever receives attention in the model essay. Consequent imitations can be as free or as loose as the need demands, but generally the imitations become freer as the writer gains confidence.

Sometimes imitation is ineffective as a teaching device for improving student writing. Kehl, quoting a Burmese proverb, warns, "Sparrows who emulate peacocks are likely to break a thigh," and from the Japanese he cautions, "The crow that imitates a cormorant gets drowned" (137). To Kehl the lesson is clear: "Models should be congenial to the students; perhaps, at least initially, the sparrow might emulate an effective sparrow, the crow a proficient crow" (137).

To be effective, imitation assignments must be appropriate to the students' level of competence. If the assignment represents skills that students already know and practice, they will be bored. If it is beyond their present abilities, they will be frustrated. In either case, there is no transfer to their own writing.

Instructors who use imitation to teach writing report that skills acquired through imitative practice transfer to other writing on the level of sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Brooks and Gray, as noted, have observed improvement in sentences and paragraphs, as have D'Angelo (284) and Corbett (108). Gibson sees benefits to style and voice (106). The effective use of essays as models for imitation has been reported by Rodrigues (26). Williams, having done one of the few empirical studies on imitation and writing, compares imitation with sentence combining:

[In] an analysis of flaw counts among this most competent group, . . . evaluators found fewer flaws in logic/organization and style among the imitators. This result supports our original thesis: When students are provided with model structures to impose on experience of their own devising, they will be better able to impose similar structures on self-generated content during real writing tasks. (37)

Attention to form, rather than impairing creativity, encourages it both in thought generation and in extension to new forms. Imitation allows inexperienced writers to learn from those who are more experienced, frees them from the inhibiting anxiety of striving for correct form and appropriate style, and functions as the vehicle for generating new thoughts. By enabling students to write in conventional and appropriate ways, imitation permits access to the community of writers. Only when basic writers have the freedom that comes from knowing the acceptable forms can they participate fully in that community. Only then, as a matter of fact, does rhetorical stance have any meaning for them. For only then can they adapt form and meaning to particular audiences. Only then can they express their personae as writers. Only then can they say what they want to say.

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Jean Sanborn

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES: SENTENCE COMBINING IN ADVANCED ESL

At many colleges, advanced English as a Second Language students enroll in regular basic writing courses or visit the Writing Center, particularly at small schools like Colby College that do not have an ESL program or faculty trained in ESL. Until very recently, texts and materials appropriate for the particular needs of this group of students have been scarce, so six years ago I began using sentence combining in the course of a somewhat random and sometimes desperate search for useful materials. To my surprise, it worked. I was surprised at the effectiveness of this technique because I have always been convinced that no one learns to write by doing exercises on manufactured sentences. Yet the advanced ESL students in my classes became engaged with the sentence combining, they testified that it was helpful, and their writing improved. Although I cannot say that their writing improved directly and solely because of sentence combining, the exercises may have been of indirect benefit by acting as catalysts in the language acquisition process. Moreover, the most beneficial effects of sentence combining may occur in advanced ESL students' attitude toward acquiring English.

The international students at Colby are a small group, rarely more than fifteen arriving each year, of whom only a third usually elect to take advantage of the extra help in writing offered by the Writing Center. In some semesters their language abilities are similar enough to form a class in which the interaction among students stimulates more rapid progress than a tutorial achieves. Sometimes, however, the students' needs are so different that individual tutorials are necessary. The Colby inter-

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national students are a very cosmopolitan group in two senses. Their homes range from Iceland to Ghana to China to Iran, and most of them come from urban, wealthy, educated families. Landing in Waterville, a small, rather unc cosmopolitan city in central Maine, causes not only a language shock but an intense culture shock as well. Since the group of second language students is so small, no special academic program exists for these students beyond an international student advisor and the services of the Writing Center.

Most of Colby's international students have studied English for six or eight years and have scored at least 600 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exams, the exams most colleges use to evaluate international applicants. They are clearly advanced students of the language. Although they are often shy in conversation when they first arrive, they are usually adept in speech within three or four months. They are frankly insulted by the suggestion that they take any "remedial" course. They are, after all, skilled in reading and writing their native languages. Yet many of them flounder in the required Freshman Composition course. Their previous study of English has almost without exception concentrated on grammar and translation, with some conversation. Rarely have they composed in English at all. It is with this group of advanced ESL students that sentence combining has proved beneficial.

When I decided to try sentence combining with these students, the first text I used was Strong's *Sentence Combining: a Composing Book*. In the open-ended combinations of the first part of Strong's book, the students tended to use only the structures they were comfortable with, those which they had already acquired. Thus, the open exercises did not seem to advance students' knowledge but did illustrate the level of language which the students had achieved. The second section of this book, which involves directed embedding in multilevel sentences, did help students use more complex syntax. Self-consciously at first, they began to use structures like participles and absolutes in their writing. Familiarity with the more complex syntax also helped them with their reading. One student announced: "I'm finding it easier to read my economics book after doing these exercises." Sternglass suggests that sentence combining helps reading by giving students practice in "chunking," building more meaning into phrases and clauses that are short enough to be held in short-term memory while the reader "build[s] the conceptual bridges among them that are necessary for reading comprehension" (326). To push students into manipulating syntax which they had not yet acquired, I looked for a book that would offer more direction without totally eliminating the open-ended combinations, which have the advantages of illustrating rhetorical options and of encouraging play with language. For the past three years I have been using *The Writer's Options: Combining to Composing* by Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg. With more advanced students I have also recently been using sentence combining exercises of the restricted modeling form, such as those found in *Four Worlds of Writing* by Lauer *et al.* because they offer more variety and complexity than those in other texts.

While working on the sentence combining exercises in these texts, students also write frequent original compositions. On an individual basis they may do extra work on particular structural problems; articles and sequence of tenses are the most common. The most advanced students also work explicitly on rhetoric in *Approaches to Academic Reading and Writing* by Arnaudet and Barrett. I do not use a rhetoric in writing courses with native-speaking students, but the prescribed rhetoric of the American academic community is different from that of the universities of many of the ESL students. American academic rhetoric favors a relentlessly linear argument using certain modes of logic, as a glance at the table of contents in any rhetoric text will illustrate. Kaplan has pointed out that in other cultures different modes of arguments are acceptable. More recently, Purves has continued the argument for cultural as well as disciplinary discourse communities. ESL students gain confidence by working explicitly in a prescribed rhetorical form which may be further from their usual modes of thinking and writing than it is for native speakers of English and products of American school systems.

Whenever ESL students at any level do sentence combining, they read their combinations aloud, a step I am convinced is essential to help them internalize rhythms of the deeply embedded syntax. The syntax needs to become part of the inner voice that mediates in writing. If I have a class rather than tutorials, we can compare combinations in discussions that lead to understanding of rhetorical purpose and effect. Students choose different combinations for a reason, and a change in syntax is a change in meaning. Using discussions to make these differences explicit helps students to form a connection between exercises and meaning, which, as I will argue below, is the bridge from learning language to acquisition of language.

A typical example of growth in both syntactic fluency and overall quality of writing comes from a French student, an economics major who studied at Colby for his junior year. When I first met Henri, I asked him to write spontaneously, in class for twenty minutes, about his first hours on campus. He wrote, in part:

When I arrived here, I had been surprized by the campus. Before to come I had seen pictures. But last tuesday was a sunny day and it gave to the place wonderful colors.

I met since the first minute my roommate. He is a senior. I helpt him in his job. (R.A.). First thing I did after having cleaned my things up, was to walk around the buildings. I went to the fieldhouse. I hoped to meet a coach. One of the track field team. In the secretary office I met a physical education professor. He took my name, address and specialty and told me that I had to keep in contact with the department. . . .

Three months later, after some limited sentence combining mainly on relative clauses and nominals, some work in rhetorical patterns of English academic prose, and considerable writing and revising of papers on his own topics, I asked Henri to write about a poster of a meditative

chimpanzee that hangs on the wall of the Writing Center. Again, this excerpt was written in class, without preparation on the topic:

Sometimes the Nature gives us the impression of sadness; on the poster of the chimpanzee, different meanings of body language translate this feeling of sadness.

First the facial expression of the little black monkey shows us a state of mind when the animal does not understand what is going on around it. An opened mouth can also express the surprise, but the sadness of its eyes confirms the impression of "non-hope" attitude. . . .

The hands and feet of this body give us the impression of a being frustrated, the union of all the members in a little square in the front could be interpreted as a body tied by a lack of something we do not see on the picture. . . .

Not only are the sentences more deeply embedded than those in his first writing, but the paper is focused, has a sense of purpose, and a more confident voice. "First the facial expression of the little black monkey shows us a state of mind when the animal does not understand what is going on around it" is a sentence that I suspect could not have been written in September. When I pointed out these passages to Henri to illustrate his improvement, he immediately brightened and said, "Well, it is because of all those little sentences you had me put together!"

Although many advanced ESL students have made progress similar to Henri's, I cannot prove that these gains in syntactic fluency are due to sentence combining alone. These students are simultaneously immersed in many other social and academic language situations that accelerate their acquisition of English during their first few months in the United States. However, all of the students in this study have said that sentence combining has helped them to write and read more fluently. Although my conclusions are based on experience with a small sampling of students and much of my evidence is anecdotal, those of us who work closely with students on the very personal business of writing are learning to listen to and value such evidence.

When I decided that the Colby advanced ESL students needed more than just a kindly tutor and I started a discouraging search for materials, I tried sentence combining with considerable misgivings. My first obstacle was my own bias. As Rose points out, sentence combining is not a new method for English teachers. I have always perceived the using of sentence combining as the teaching of grammar rather than the teaching of writing. The exercises are like those in traditional grammar texts which present two short sentences with the direction to combine them using an adverb clause or an appositive or a participle. Unlike traditional exercises, however, sentence-combining exercises do move students away from drill and toward the rhetorical contexts of language because they emphasize combining blocks of ideas rather than segments of syntax. Nevertheless, sentence-combining exercises are couched in manufactured

language rather than in the students' own language, and I still believe that manipulating textbook language is an obstacle to the development of writing abilities. Writing is making meaning. Growth in writing and thinking occurs through engagement with one's own meanings. Thus, while sentence combining may help students improve their syntactic fluency, the students still need to do extensive composing and revising.

The second obstacle that discouraged me from using sentence combining is that research has been conflicting and inconclusive. In 1969 Mellon conducted the first major study of the efficacy of sentence combining. Mellon's subjects gained in syntactic fluency but not in overall writing quality. O'Hare in 1973, and later Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg in 1978, detected growth in both syntax and overall quality, but Ney in 1976 found no gains even in syntactic fluency among the students using sentence combining in his study.

These studies are subject to the limitations of unavoidable variables such as differences in amount of practice, ages of subjects, skills of teachers, and criteria for judging overall writing quality. Hake and Williams, illustrating another variable, found that the effects of sentence combining are markedly different for "competent" writers than for "incompetent" writers. They also challenge the usually accepted value of longer T-units ("T-unit" is a label for an independent clause and all its related constituents) suggesting that "smaller is better" (86). Faigley (293) and Witte (176) further question the value of the T-unit as a measure of writing quality, pointing out that it is task-related. An individual writer will use, for example, different lengths of T-units for descriptive writing than for persuasive writing. At the extremes, cookbooks differ from bureaucratic prose (Faigley 294). Witte questions the stability of the T-unit length for an individual even in similar tasks, especially if the writer is inexperienced (176).

Researchers and teachers hoped that exercises in embedding would speed up the development of syntactic fluency. Hunt's studies indicate, however, that children will acquire the ability to consolidate clauses developmentally without being taught the transformational rules, though not everyone achieves the same level of proficiency, of course. Moreover, as Duckworth points out, studies of cognitive development in areas other than writing suggest that development cannot be speeded up by controlled practice.

Thus, experimental evidence would not convince most writing teachers to place much confidence in sentence combining. The sentence-combining studies I have cited so far were all performed on native speakers, however, and advanced ESL students differ linguistically from native speakers. They are developmentally mature users of their native languages, but immature users of English. They lack both competence and confidence in English, and exercises in syntax seem to be useful for them. They are also old enough, decentered enough, to be able to consciously examine their own linguistic processes. Yet studies of sentence combining with ESL students are not encouraging. A recent study with advanced ESL students, conducted by Perkins and Hill at Southern

Illinois University, concludes that "the advanced ESL classroom is no place for [sentence combining]" (13). Not only did the subjects fail to improve substantially their overall writing ability, but their scores on a "Test of Ability to Subordinate," a test which explicitly measures the ability to combine sentences, were no higher than those of the control group. These researchers report that results of the other studies of sentence combining with ESL students are similarly disappointing (5). Even if it is argued that the length of time spent on sentence combining is too short or the test situation too stressful for ESL students, the experimental evidence certainly does not encourage ESL teachers to devote much class time to sentence combining.

A third obstacle to my choosing sentence combining as a method of teaching writing to second-language students is that it contradicts the implications of theories of language acquisition, both first and second language. Language acquisition theorists (Chomsky; R. Brown; Krashen) distinguish between *learned* behavior and *acquired* behavior. Learning is a conscious search for rules and their applications; acquisition occurs subconsciously. Learning, when successful, occurs within a relatively short time; acquisition is developmental and slow. Learning is imposed from outside the person; acquisition is a growth of existing structures within the person in response to the environmental situation. As Krashen has pointed out, language is *learned* when the student consciously learns the rules of syntax and applies them in practice. Language is *acquired* when a student is engaged in making *meaning* out of the language around him or her and arrives at a subconscious understanding of formal grammatical structure in the process (10). The important distinction is that the goal of the learner is syntax while the goal of the acquirer is meaning (21). Those of us who have struggled with a foreign language know that the sense of mastery comes only when we can communicate in that second language without stopping to think of learned rules.

While a first language is acquired developmentally, a second language is usually learned in school. Most foreign language texts present the grammar of the language from the seemingly simple to the seemingly complex, covering only a small part of the language. Class work focuses on error correction and on translation. The student is always looking at the surface of language, thinking of rules and lexical meanings rather than the meaning of the text. Even when adult learners of English as a second language apply themselves to learning the grammatical rules with good will and often with pressing professional motivation, they learn the language, not acquire it, if they are limited to the rule-oriented school environment. They speak hesitantly because they must consciously process their meaning through rules before it reaches utterance. They write awkwardly because they compose in their native languages and then translate.

Teaching language through rule-learning assumes that with knowledge of the rules and effective practice, learning will transform into acquisition. Krashen argues, however, that this transformation does not occur, that true acquisition of a second language will occur only "when

the acquirer understands input containing a structure that the acquirer is 'due' to acquire" (84). His concept is similar to Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (84-91). Krashen insists that it is crucial that people find *meaning* in the language input in order to acquire it (21), just as they did in their first languages. The role which Krashen sees for grammatical rules is presented in his Monitor Theory. When adult second language users have time to examine their language consciously, as when writing it, they can use known rules for self-correction (89-104). For example, if learners know the rule for forming the past participle, they could recognize that "I have learn the rule" should be corrected with the *-ed*. They would not, however, use the correct form consistently and fluently in speech until it was acquired.

If language acquisition depends upon a meaning-focused encounter with a new language rather than a conscious learning of grammar, and if knowledge of the rules and drill does not "turn into" acquisition, then sentence combining would not seem to be a useful activity for ESL students. While sentence-combining exercises involve using language rather than learning rules, they focus learners more on the making of syntax than on the making of meaning. Thus, sentence combining might improve the use of structures already acquired, but it would not lead directly to the acquisition of new structures.

If sentence combining does not lead to language acquisition, if it is contrary to my pedagogical biases, and if research does not support its effectiveness, then why does it help my advanced ESL students, according to my observations and to their testimony? I believe that the exercises succeed for several reasons and on several levels. Superficially, because they do not limit vocabulary, as many ESL texts do, and because they provide a richer context than the students are able to produce spontaneously, sentence-combining exercises expand the ESL students' vocabularies and give them more meaning to work with. Strong's book, especially, is full of the vernacular ESL students are hearing around them for the first time; and familiarity with colloquial language should increase their ability to find meaning, that essential condition for acquisition, in the English which surrounds them daily. Students try to figure out the meanings of strange words in the exercises for two reasons: first, they cannot combine the sentences without knowing what the words mean; and second, they are interested in the content of the exercises. Although some minimal rules are provided in the patterns, the process of combining the sentences requires students to focus on meaning, especially in the exercises that extend beyond two or three sentences. When we discuss the different combinations generated by students in a particular exercise, I find that ESL students in my classes have already considered differences in meaning that are created by alternate combinations. They can articulate convincingly their reasons for their choices, better perhaps than some native-speaking writers because the advanced ESL students are more conscious of language. Even though they are doing exercises, they are aware that the combinations they make affect meaning.

Proponents of sentence combining have changed their focus over the years from syntax to meaning. In 1969, Mellon insisted that sentence combining was a-rhetorical, that "the sentence-combining practice had nothing to do with the teaching of writing" (79), and that it was no more reasonable to expect that proficiency in sentence combining would carry over into writing than that skill in grammar exercises would improve writing. The proceedings of the Second Sentence Combining Conference at Miami University, published in 1985, is entitled *Sentence Combining: a Rhetorical Perspective*. Rose sees sentence combining as a bridge between grammar and writing (491). Winterowd, who looks at sentence combining in the context of Krashen's theories about language learning and language acquisition, goes further and calls it a bridge between laboratory and workshop and hence between learning and acquisition (246).

When used as a bridge from syntax to meaning, then, sentence-combining exercises provide the opportunity for students to encounter language at the level of meaning, which Krashen insists is necessary for acquisition to occur. ESL texts with artificially controlled vocabulary and controlled compositions limit the students' opportunities to grapple with meaning. I believe, however, that the success of sentence combining occurs also at a deeper level, on the bridge from learning to acquisition. In the process of doing these exercises, students may recapitulate in some rough way the language acquisition process of the native speaker. The exercises present sentences which are at least close to kernel strings and which need complex embedding. The combining involves moving from deep structures through various transformations to different surface structures, which, though much oversimplified, is similar to the way in which we construct our first language. Students in my classes breeze right through the relative clause and participle sections of *The Writer's Options* (Daiker, *et al.*), presumably because these are structures they have already acquired. They begin to stumble on prepositional phrases, probably because of the extent to which prepositions are dependent on meaning. For example, "peculiar to the Americans" is very different in both its meanings from "peculiar in the Americans." When the ESL students encounter the absolute, they become visibly uncomfortable; it "sounds funny." The absolute, however, occurs often in academic writing, so students need to understand it and, eventually, use it. After working on structures like the absolute in sentence-combining exercises, students begin to recognize the structures in their reading long before they can use them spontaneously in their writing. Familiarity with new structures thus increases meaningful English language experience for ESL students and facilitates acquisition.

Still, as a bridge from syntax to meaning or as a recapitulation of the language acquisition process, students may acquire English *while* engaged in sentence combining, but I do not think they acquire it directly *because* of sentence combining. Sentence combining seems to act as a catalyst, a stimulus to acquisition but not a part of it. Language acquisition is not entirely cognitive, however, and at another level, sentence

combining may have a more direct effect on the language student. Krashen maintains that adults' chief disability in acquiring a new language is not a decrease in Chomsky's "language acquisition device" but an increase in the "affective filter" (45), a rather sterile term for the stress and anxieties experienced in the learning situation and in the new culture, as well as other individual attitudes which may inhibit the acquisition of a new language. Affective pressures on ESL students range from ego strength to culture shock. Brown advances the hypothesis that "an adult who fails to master a second language in a second culture may for a host of reasons have failed to synchronize linguistic and cultural development" (139). In one direction, according to Brown, cultural insecurities inhibit the learner; and in the opposite situation, becoming comfortable in a culture before fully acquiring the language, may fossilize errors. In addition to cultural stress, much is also at stake in the individual egos of advanced ESL students, as it is in all students. Students I teach hate to make errors in their own essays. Often they say, "I knew that." They stiffen up and narrow the scope of their writing, limiting themselves to comfortable, already-acquired syntax, which slows down the acquisition process since they do not use new structures which they hear and read. When doing sentence-combining exercises, they are not so sensitive about the errors they make. Because they are not invested in the meanings of those sentences given to them from outside of themselves, they can manipulate them more freely and make the linguistic advances they are ready for more quickly.

Sentence combining can also relieve anxieties at a deeper level. By taking discrete bits of language, allowing them to break down into flux and even chaos, and finally succeeding in building a new sentence with new meaning—almost an artifact—ESL students experience some control over language at a time when most of their lives may seem out of control in the new social and academic culture. Such control restores a sense of competence, a deep psychological need for all of us (White 303). Thus, in a variety of ways, success at sentence combining may lessen the "affective filter" that Krashen refers to and allow the acquisition process to proceed.

Finally, sentence combining may have an effect on an attitude that is as much cognitive as affective. Advanced ESL students have been successful learners of English at home in their own cultural environments. Even if they prefer to learn English by studying rules, functioning in an English-speaking culture requires them to start acquiring language outside the classroom. They will have to use English spontaneously. The change from thinking about rules to the readiness to acquire English by focusing on meaning does not occur automatically. The students must change their mental and emotional stance entirely. The conscious second-language rules already learned are not sufficient; the subconscious first language does not serve. If advanced ESL students are to acquire enough English to think in it and express themselves in it, they must let go of their focus on the rules. At this point, sentence combining again presents an opportunity that may overcome its obstacles. Although sentence

combining is still “learning” behavior involving rules and will not cause language acquisition by itself, it may move ESL students toward the stance necessary for acquisition to occur, across an attitude bridge as well as a bridge from syntax to meaning. Their thinking about language may change from the application of rules to the construction of syntax which will carry their meanings.

Attitudes toward language may change because of the element of “play” in sentence combining. Mellon suggested that sentence combining belonged with the language-games part of an English curriculum: “I continue to see [sentence-combining games] in the upper elementary grades, given alone and apart from any formal grammar study, as a valuable addition to the arsenal of language-developing activities Moffett includes in his language arts program” (80). Moffett, nevertheless, is a vigorous critic of sentence combining. Recently, Weiss has looked at sentence combining as “play,” by considering problem-solving “a kind of interiorized play” constructing order out of disequilibrium. Although Weiss does not talk about ESL students, her comment that “delight in connection making neutralizes the stress of composing” (218) accurately reflects the experience of the ESL students I teach.

Strong also brings sentence combining into the realm of play. He uses an analogy to Gallwey’s *Inner World of Tennis*. Gallwey maintains that a tennis player must stop thinking about how to hit the ball and concentrate on the flow of movement and sensation of the total game; the successful player ignores the parts and focuses on the whole. Polanyi offers a vivid illustration of this interference: “If a pianist shifts his attention from the piece he is playing to the observation of what he is doing with his fingers while playing it, he gets confused and may have to stop” (56). Elbow is operating on the same theory when he insists that writers must turn off the editor as they compose, that editing and composing are two separate cognitive modes that interfere with each other. Strong believes that sentence combining will develop “automaticity” in syntax so that writers can concentrate on meaning (340-341). Thus, playing the game of sentence combining may help the advanced ESL student to make a similar shift in focus from learning to acquisition.

The “feeling” so often expressed by advanced ESL students that sentence combining helps them is not as fuzzy a response as it may seem at first. Students need to cross the linguistic bridge from syntax to meaning, the educational bridge from learning to acquisition, and the emotional bridge from timid reliance on the security of rule-learning to readiness for the risk of meaning-filled language encounters that will lead to acquisition. If sentence combining can act as the catalyst that starts the students across these bridges, then their “feeling” that sentence combining helps them is valid. Since academic language is a “second language” for basic writers, teachers of BW as well as teachers of ESL might find sentence combining worth considering as part of their writing programs.

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Kristine F. Anderson

USING A SPELLING SURVEY TO DEVELOP BASIC WRITERS' LINGUISTIC AWARENESS: A RESPONSE TO ANN B. DOBIE

Ann Dobie in "Orthographic Theory and Practice, or How to Teach Spelling," *Journal of Basic Writing*, Fall 1986, focuses on a persistent concern for basic writing instructors—students' spelling errors and remediation. After briefly discussing spelling reform and research, Dobie presents a course plan designed to improve spelling performance with fifteen to twenty minutes of instruction and skill work each day.

The premise for Dobie's plan reflects some of the current notions about effective spelling instruction. Using students' errors as a starting point for instruction is sound; and some of the activities she recommends, particularly the use of word groups and mnemonics, will be helpful to basic writers. However, most of her activities are not integrated within the framework of current orthographic theory and practice. She never explains how current views influence instruction for basic writers and error analysis. Her most recent reference is 1976. She omits several landmark studies from the late 1970s and early 1980s which discuss students' acquisition and use of orthographic knowledge (Henderson and Beers; Templeton; Frith).

Furthermore, while Dobie comments that spelling instruction must take an inductive approach "in the context of general language study (43)," she focuses on a "skill and drill" approach. Instead of encouraging students to discover their own error patterns, she groups their errors according to skill activities. The learning principles behind many of the activities Dobie suggests reinforce low-order memory tasks that involve repetition and sensory learning.

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Also, Dobie emphasizes the importance of phonological knowledge and learning techniques that involve the auditory sense—an inappropriate approach for poor spellers who typically rely too heavily on “how words sound.” She suggests using phonics and dictation activities with nonsense words so students learn that they can “depend on their ears to some degree” (47).

I would argue that effective approach to error analysis and spelling instruction for basic writers must be based on research which describes English orthography as a complex but highly regular writing system. Studies conducted by Chomsky and Halle in 1968 indicate that written English represents linguistic information at the levels of sound, meaning, and syntax. Although English spelling represents sounds to some degree, it more often reflects the structural patterns and underlying meaning of words (Becker, Dixon, and Anderson-Inman 2). Many words similar in meaning are similar in spelling. Predictable phonetic variations are not usually represented in order to maintain the meaning connection among related words. To illustrate, although “courage” and “courageous” differ phonetically, they are similar in spelling.

Some spelling difficulties can be explained, therefore, in terms of limited linguistic knowledge of the different levels of the writing system (Frith 283) and/or a breakdown in the composing process. Poor spellers seem to be locked into a limited number of strategies which reflect a lack of linguistic awareness and affect fluency. According to two studies I completed in 1983 and 1987, poor spellers have not made the qualitative shift to higher level strategies which draw on underlying levels of linguistic information. Unlike good spellers, they lack an implicit understanding of the morphemic and syntactic constraints placed on English spelling.

A qualitative analysis of spelling errors provides valuable information about the rules and strategies students draw on while composing, and about their writing behavior. When students analyze their strategies and look for patterns in their errors, they begin to see the “logic of their mistakes” (Shaughnessy 13). As students determine the source or cause of their errors, as well as the type of error, they realize that their errors are systematic, rather than random. More importantly, they learn to control their errors and develop a variety of effective spelling strategies necessary for fluent writing.

A simple yet effective approach, I have found, involves using an informal survey that helps students analyze their strategies and errors to develop a sense of linguistic awareness (Anderson, forthcoming). The survey instrument appears in the Appendix of this essay. Since correct spelling requires a high degree of linguistic skill and a combination of strategies, the first five items in the survey focus on different strategies used by effective spellers: sound; rules; analogies, or words related in meaning or structure; the dictionary; and visual information. The sixth and seventh questions focus on proofreading, or self-correcting strategies used during the editing stage. The rest of the questions focus on an error classification scheme which involves seven general categories of words that often prove troublesome for basic writers: (1) words with silent

letters; (2) words with unstressed vowels or schwas (ə); (3) words with prefixes; (4) words with Latin or Greek roots; (5) words with suffixes; (6) homonym forms; (7) common words and phrases, including transitions (Anderson, forthcoming). These error categories were determined on the basis of a preliminary study which analyzed the spelling errors of 55 basic writers enrolled in a developmental English course during the fall quarter of 1983.

Students complete the survey after they have written two or three papers and listed all of their errors. However, the instructor may wish to administer the survey, or part of it, midway through a term. Since the survey is designed to encourage self-assessment and error analysis, students simply check the appropriate column under "always," "frequently," "occasionally," and "never."

After students complete the survey and determine their dominant strategies and error patterns, instructors can plan appropriate activities and instruction. To illustrate, students who frequently misspell words with silent letters and unstressed vowels are likely trying to spell words according "to the way they sound." Like young writers who rely on sound-letter correspondences, their strategies are limited to surface level information. They are not aware of the morphological principles and underlying patterns inherent in the writing system.

Instructors can help these students understand the importance of silent letters by pointing out the role of silent letters in maintaining the meaning connection between related words. For example, the silent "b" in bomb is pronounced in "bombard." As students make connections between related words with silent letters, they learn a key principle in English spelling: SPELLING REFLECTS MEANING. They are no longer forced to memorize individual words, as they develop a systematic means of dealing with large segments of vocabulary (Chomsky and Halle 65). More importantly, they begin to identify patterns so they can start making some appropriate generalizations about pattern principles in the writing system.

Many poor spellers who rely on sound also make a variety of errors when spelling words with affixes, particularly when the addition of a suffix results in a change in pronunciation, as in "divine" and "divinity." Such students need systematic instruction that will help them make connections between related words and frequent patterns, such as "console" and "consolation," where a long vowel is shortened with the addition of a suffix. These students also need instruction in patterns with a change in pronunciation and the stress of a derivative, such as "explain" and "explanation" where a change occurs in both the pronunciation and spelling.

Furthermore, students who misspell words with affixes, particularly suffixes, seem to have problems with spelling rules. They either fail to use appropriate rules because they are unaware that the writing system is largely rule-governed and/or they overgeneralize rules. Such students can benefit from some explicit instruction in some of the spelling rules concerning affixation, such as maintaining the base of a word when

adding a prefix, and keeping the final “e” when adding a suffix beginning with a consonant. I want to emphasize, however, the application of appropriate rules in meaningful writing, rather than in rote memorization tasks or drill activities.

Because many poor writers are also poor readers with limited vocabularies, they are often unfamiliar with the basic structure and meaning of words. Instructors can extend students’ existing vocabularies by introducing them to the etymology of the writing system as well as some of the more commonly occurring Latin and Greek roots and combining forms. For example, instructors can present some of the frequently used Latin roots, such as *duct* (to lead); *fac, fic* (to make); and *pos* (to put). Instructors may wish, however, to introduce students to the Greek numerical prefixes first, since they are easier to isolate and identify than many of the Latin roots.

Many students have problems spelling homonym forms because these students concentrate on sound, or phonological information. They can benefit from a review of homonyms and commonly confused words. The students also can use reminders about the importance of context and syntactic information in selecting the appropriate form. The use of mnemonics might also help students distinguish between different forms (e.g., the word dessert has two s’s because it’s super sweet).

Common words and phrases, including transitions, are another source of frequent errors for basic writers. Since they usually do very little reading, basic writers often do not develop a memory for correct forms. They sometimes join or separate words and phrases in unconventional ways, producing “eventhough” and “further more.” In addition, they often do not attend to the sequence of letters, so they frequently transpose letters: “certian” and “esle.”

Because visual information is an important aspect of accurate spelling and the development of effective strategies (Barron; Frith; Marsh, et al; Simon and Simon), instructors must help students improve their visual memories. Instructors can encourage students to make flash cards of demon words the students consistently misspell. Students can then review the cards so that they can recognize and then produce the correct forms in their writing.

Finally, I have found that many basic writers make numerous errors because of poor and/or inappropriate proofreading habits. Students try to correct as they write and become hypercorrectors, developing a labored, jerky writing style. To become fluent writers they must learn to separate the production and revising process from the proofreading process. Instructors need to provide students with the time and opportunities to become more reflective writers so that they can develop self-correcting strategies. Some students persist in making errors simply because they run out of time and do not proofread their final drafts. Once students can identify their error patterns, they can quickly circle or mark words they think are incorrect in their drafts, and they can check those words when they proofread. Instructors can also demonstrate specific proofreading techniques that help students recognize their errors. One

of the most effective techniques involves using a 3 x 5 notecard with a slit or window cut in the middle. Another involves using a half sheet of paper. Both techniques are helpful because they force students to slow down and look at a few words or a line at a time. Students need also to acquire a sense of doubt which will motivate them to refer to the dictionary when they are unsure of a spelling.

In summary, an instructional program for basic writers with spelling problems must be carefully integrated into the context of general language study, and such a program must be based upon current research on the writing system. Rather than simply marking errors and drilling on a list of problem words, students need to analyze their strategies and errors qualitatively. As students begin to monitor their writing and analyze their errors, they develop a sense of linguistic awareness and make useful generalizations about the underlying patterns and regularities in the writing system. They also acquire a variety of strategies which can be transferred to new words and can improve the students' fluency in writing.

Appendix 1

Spelling Survey

	ALWAYS	FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
1. Do you try to spell words the way you think they sound?				
2. Do you try to use spelling rules when appropriate?				
3. If you cannot spell a word, do you consider the meaning or structure of the word?				
4. If you cannot spell a word, do you consider the spelling of a related word or a word in the same family?				
5. Do you use a dictionary or wordbook rather than a thesaurus?				
6. Can you tell if a word you've written doesn't "look right"?				
7. Do you take time to proofread specifically for spelling errors as you write?				
8. Do you take time to proofread specifically for spelling errors as you edit?				
9. a. Do you keep a current list of misspelled words?				
b. Do you frequently misspell the same words?				
10. Do you notice any pattern in your misspelled words?				
a. Words with silent letters				
b. Words with unstressed vowels				
c. Words with prefixes				
d. Words with suffixes				
e. Words with a Latin or Greek root				
f. Homonym forms				
g. Common words and phrases, including transitions				

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Joseph G.R. Martinez
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RECONSIDERING COGNITION AND THE BASIC WRITER: A RESPONSE TO MYRA KOGEN

In her 1986 *Journal of Basic Writing* article "The Conventions of Expository Writing," Myra Kogen questions some current application of cognitive theory to basic writing research and criticizes statements that basic writers are cognitively immature. While Kogen's arguments rely primarily upon her background and experience as a writing instructor, her position can also be defended from the perspective of cognitive psychology.

False assumptions and flawed methodology undermine the work of many who attempt to apply the cognitive theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, or Perry to composition research. Specifically, some researchers mistakenly assume that stages describing patterns of physiological and cognitive development in children must also describe the cognition of adults. Other researchers confuse cognitive development with the acquisition of specific types of knowledge or a particular world view. In addition, the common method of analyzing essays as though they provided a direct measure of cognitive processes ignores the myriad affective and situational factors which can influence learning outcomes.

Describing the cognition of adults in terms of children's developmental stages may be akin to using plane geometry to measure a three-dimensional world—that is, the limitations of one are not adequate to assess the complexities of the other. A definitive component of children's

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cognitive development, as Piaget defines it, is physiological. As John H. Flavell explains in *Cognitive Development*, "The cognitive systems of infants are indeed fundamentally and qualitatively different from those of older humans. . . . The older mind might look almost as immature as the younger one when operating in domains in which it too is an utter novice" (114). However, the similarity is apparent rather than real. For example, children may reduce complex questions to decisions between good and bad, right and wrong, lawful and unlawful because their information-processing capacity restricts them to binary operations (Halford 62). Adults in a basic writing class may produce similarly dualistic responses but for different reasons. They may have incorrectly assessed the topic or the instructor's expectations. They may be inexperienced in writing about or in making such judgements; conditioned culturally to respond to certain topics in certain ways; or uninterested in the subject to explore it meaningfully. Adult basic writers may even be trying clumsily to accommodate a complicated topic to a comparison/contrast mode of discourse. Moreover, in some cases, as with children, responses may be governed by "emotional reaction rather than cognitive possibility" (Collis 76).

Certainly, cognitive development continues into adulthood, as Janice Hays points out in her 1987 response to Myra Kogen (11-13). However, the qualitative differences between children's and adults' cognition precludes using the stages in children's development (such as Piaget's Concrete Operations stage) to describe adults' development.

Another faulty assumption of Hays' undermines attempts to use William Perry's Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development to evaluate students' level of cognitive development. Perry's Scheme, as Patricia Bizzell argues, is culture-bound (447-454). The development Perry charts from basic duality through relativism to affirmation and commitment reflects the response of a specific group of learners to a specific learning situation—a liberal arts education. In fact, Perry qualifies his findings in precisely these terms. He writes:

We have considered our students' milieu in terms of a generalized "liberal arts college." . . . With the qualification we have made—that we mean by a "liberal arts college" a pluralistic institution where the teaching of the procedures of relativistic thought is to a large extent deliberate—we are confident that our findings would hold. (206-207)

Given this limitation, Perry's Scheme is task specific—that is, it describes students' progress toward acquiring a particular world view rather than students' cognitive development in a universal sense.

Finally, researchers' methodology is seriously flawed when essays alone are used to assess students' capacity for thought. While cognitive development is a characteristic of the learner, an essay is a learning outcome, the quality of which depends upon the learner's interaction with instruction and other variables (Biggs 108). Affective and situational factors such as motivation and familiarity with a task as well as cognitive

factors, can effect a level of response lower than the learner's cognitive capacity. In addition, channel inefficiency—lack of facility in using the medium selected for response—will impede “sophisticated levels of responding” (Biggs 112-113). Since basic writers usually lack channel efficiency in the predominant mode of academic discourse—writing—we can assume that the level of learning outcome will be adversely affected. If the students are allowed to shift to a channel they are proficient in, their performance will usually improve. One researcher who labels basic writers “cognitively immature” does say that many times she has found “students who were having writing problems . . . quite able to explain verbally what they intended to express in the written assignment” (Bradford 15). The difference in the quality of the outcomes suggests that the problems are not a result of cognitive development—or the lack of cognitive development—but rather are specific to the task of writing academic prose, as Myra Kogen argues (25).

Since cognitive, affective, and situational factors could all intervene to produce what instructors read in a student's essay, the likelihood that the student's cognitive abilities can be reliably inferred from that learning outcome is small. For example, in both the study criticized by Kogen and in the response to that criticism, Janice Hays uses excerpts from student essays to assess students' positions in the Perry Scheme (“Development” 132; “Response” 20-21). In both cases, a student who assumes an adversative judgmental stance—violating the expository convention “that the world is a place of reasonableness and good intentions” (Kogen 35)—is assessed as being at Perry's Position Two, Multiplicity Pre-legitimate, in intellectual growth. However, lack of knowledge about expository conventions (a conceptual prerequisite to this learning task) and problems with channel efficiency (basic writing skills) are two cognitive factors that could have impeded a sophisticated level of response. Situational factors influencing the outcome might (or might not) have included a tense testing situation or external noise but probably did include lack of familiarity with the task. In addition, since the topics of both excerpts are emotionally charged, affective factors such as the writer's personal experiences or emotional reaction at the time of writing, could have influenced the outcome. (See Biggs, 111 ff., for a paradigm of cognitive, affective, and situational factors affecting learning outcomes and their relationship to cognitive capacity.)

Is assessing the cognitive maturity of students an appropriate concern for teachers of writing? Probably not. Janice Hays pinpoints the problem when she qualifies her initial position on assessment in “Response”: “To assign students narrowly into precise ‘positions’ is risky business for we are probably not equipped to make such judgments” (25). Psychologist John Biggs gives a similar warning to teachers of all subjects and takes the caution a step further: “The teacher is concerned with the immediate outcomes of learning, vis-à-vis the particular learning task. He or she is not a psychologist whose job it is to ‘diagnose’ from a particular task performance the student's ‘level of cognitive development’” (108). Researchers who purport to diagnose without being

diagnosticians, and research that ties cognitive assessments to task-specific schemes or equates learning outcome with learning ability, must be suspect. If the implications of such research also demean a group of students and lessen instructors' understanding of students' needs, it is time, as Myra Kogen suggests, to reconsider our methods and rethink our conclusions.

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The National Testing Network in Writing, The University of Minnesota, and The City University of New York announce the SIXTH ANNUAL NTNW CONFERENCE ON WRITING ASSESSMENT on April 15, 16, and 17, 1988 in Minneapolis, MN. This national conference for educators, administrators, and assessment personnel, will be devoted to critical issues in assessing writing in secondary and postsecondary settings. Discussion topics will include new models of writing assessment, classroom evaluation measures, assessment of writing across the curriculum, computer applications in writing assessment, impact of testing on minority and ESL students, research on writing assessment, certification of professional writing proficiency, legal implications of writing assessments, and writing program evaluation. For information and registration: Karen Greenberg, NTNW Director, 142 Irma Drive, Oceanside, NY 11572.

IN PRINT, devoted to issues and innovations in two-year and community colleges, and supported by North Shore Community College, will publish its fifth annual number in April, 1988. Lively, informative, jargon-free contributions of between one and two thousand words are sought. Poetry and fiction are welcome. Samples of the last issue will be sent on request: Carl Carlsen, IN PRINT editor, North Shore Community College, Beverly, MA 01915.

Call for Papers. Professional Concerns: English in the Two-Year College, for a special issue of TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE to be published October, 1988. Papers about (but not limited to) the following are welcome: Articulation with four-year colleges or high schools, preparation of new instructors, nontraditional/remedial/developmental studies, new degrees for experienced instructors, plight of the part-time instructor, teaching loads, student placement and exit assessment, and recent history of English in the two-year college. Please follow *MLA Style Manual* (1985) and submit two copies by March 1, 1988 deadline to: Audrey J. Roth, 8620 S.W. 118th Street, Miami, FL 33156. SASE required for manuscript return.

LITERACY CONFERENCE — SEPTEMBER 1988

The Right to Literacy, a conference sponsored by the Modern Language Association, Ohio State University, and the Federation of State Humanities Councils, will take place in Columbus, Ohio, on September 16–18, 1988. Members of the teaching profession at all levels, as well as others interested in the literacy movement, are encouraged to attend or propose individual papers. There will be as many as one hundred concurrent sessions devoted to the following areas of concern: The Uses of Literacy; Literacy and Its Enemies, Illiteracy and Its Friends; Becoming Literate Today; and Struggles for Literacy Today. The deadline for submitting proposals is January 15, 1988. Anyone interested should request a proposal form from Robert D. Denham, MLA, 10 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003.

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