

**JOURNAL
OF
BASIC WRITING**

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PROGRAMS



JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Please enclose two copies with a stamped self-addressed envelope. Authors should note that each issue of the *Journal* is devoted to one topic. The next issue will be titled VOCABULARY. REINFORCEMENT and REVISION are detailed in a call for papers, page 110. Inquiries should be directed to:

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PROGRAMS

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IN MEMORIAM

Mina P. Shaughnessy

1924-1978

Basic Writing students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes.

—Errors and Expectations

Barbara Quint Gray

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1974, Mina Shaughnessy suggested to some of her colleagues that we establish a journal, a vehicle that would carry the spirit of inquiry about teaching basic writing beyond the confines of the small group that met with her to consider our common concerns as basic writing teachers and out to the larger world of faculty who were beginning to share the need to teach skills of literacy to their students. We were, as a body, astonished by Mina's suggestion: it was at once so simple, so right, so previously beyond our thoughts. But by then we had all worked with Mina for some time in the basic writing program that she administered at The City College, and so we were accustomed to Mina's acute vision, to her ability to present us with possibilities beyond our boldest imaginings, to her talent for seeing in her faculty, as well as in her students, power to become more than any one of them, independently, would have ever suspected they could.

The idea of the *Journal of Basic Writing* grew into its concrete realization in Mina's living room, where we decided on its format, parceled out the tasks that lay in its initial production, and met again and again to review our progress and refine our directions in those early days when basic writing was not yet the realm of professional and scholarly commitment that Mina helped to make it. When Mina moved from the City College English Department to establish the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, the *Journal* moved with her, both because it was a resource and because it was, in some sense, hers—conceived out of her imagination and growing under her watchful eye, albeit possessed of its own will and judgment, for better or worse.

When the editors decided to devote an issue to basic writing programs around the United States, we did not foresee that by the time it was completed, Mina would have died. Yet, there is a sense in which the topic is particularly fitting for the issue in which we bid her farewell, for

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although past issues have presented different approaches to error, or different rationales for courses, different principles of evaluation, or different methods of utilizing different grammars, there is probably not a program presented within these pages that has not felt the influence of Mina's vision of student potential.

The programs that we offer here were not chosen because they were in any sense her programs or programs that she necessarily knew or endorsed. But, in calling for and reviewing papers for this issue, and in communicating with their authors, we learned again what we had already known: that Mina's work, as presented in *Errors and Expectations* as well as in the countless talks she gave, papers she wrote, and meetings she attended across the country, infuses basic writing programs in ways that they can identify and credit as well as in subtle and indefinable ways. The very term "basic writing," now in general use, was her term initially and grew out of her refusal to see the students who studied that subject as remedial, or handicapped, or deprived except in the sense that their previous education had failed to serve them.

Programs that address the concerns to which Mina was committed are only beginning to develop. Indeed, the one she shaped is less than ten years old. The programs we present here were selected on the basis of the apparent quality of the program as well as of its written representation. The selection does not attempt to be representative, or balanced, or to suggest that these are the six best or most successful programs. They are offered, instead, as sample possibilities among many, perhaps artificially frozen in time by the act of writing about them, probably already somewhat altered by the demands of the students and the institutions that they serve. They cover a broad spectrum, from the COMP-LAB program at York College, which provides individualized exercise on basic elements of standard grammar in a laboratory setting, to the DOORS program at Illinois Central College, which applies Piagetian theory to teaching rhetorical skills. They include two different approaches to developmental writing at large state universities, one comprehensive English-as-a-Second-Language program, and the Expository Writing program at New York University, which constitutes one response to the growing national sense that, even at private, selective institutions, freshmen need considerable work to develop their writing skills.

A call for essays on the same theme a year or two from now would undoubtedly yield different products and reflect concerns perhaps only now beginning to be felt. But it is certain that programs currently in

effect as well as programs under development are indebted to Mina for her modest but deep conviction that faculty, not students, need to be remediated if writing is to be taught well, that the overwhelming majority of semi-literate students that populate basic writing classes can become articulate writers if their teachers can only discover sufficiently effective ways of leading them to that goal. In offering this review of basic writing programs, the editors record Mina's passing from our midst and express our gratitude for the beginning that she gave to us and to the field of basic writing.

Paula Johnson

WRITING FACE TO FACE

Renewed requirements and proficiency testing have grown so common in the last few years of American higher education that one more mandatory freshman composition course and one more mandatory test would in themselves hardly claim attention. But the two main parts of New York University's new Expository Writing Program—a two-semester required freshman course in composition, a writing proficiency test in the junior year—are, in hope and in practice, more than a merely formal reflection of the back-to-basics movement. Details of the faculty legislation that in the spring of 1978 mandated the new program indicate a forward rather than a reactionary direction: there are, for instance, to be no exemptions from the required course; very able freshmen, so judged at present by the scores of 650 or better on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, are placed in Honors sections that are set at a level of challenge proper to what in most colleges would be an intermediate or even advanced course in expository prose. At all levels, the course amply deserves its title of Writing Workshop: sections are limited to fifteen students, who write constantly in a variety of modes. In the second semester, sections are grouped according to interest areas, with readings—and writing—in humanities or social sciences or natural sciences, as the student may choose. A tutorial center, to serve chiefly as a safety net for students who fail the Junior-year proficiency exam, but also to be open to students who in any context are unhappy writers, is part of the faculty plan and will come into being the fall of 1980.

That seemingly far-off date measures the scope of NYU's changed approach to composition. Until this year students in the College of Arts and Sciences and in various programs in other schools had to take a one-semester writing course unless they were exempted, followed, for education students, by a semester of an introduction to literature. Under

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the new plan, not only do these same students enroll for a full year in Writing Workshop, but so, too, do students from every four-year undergraduate program in the University. Because the undergraduate requirement has broadened while section size has decreased, the sheer number of people involved has grown dramatically—from 1200 to 1700 freshmen; from about 25 to 56 graduate assistants; from no or few regular faculty teaching composition to some fifteen. And more growth is to come, since the course requirement also applies to transfer students, of whom NYU has many. When the requirement becomes effective for them in the fall of 1979, the enrollment in Writing Workshop will be about half again what it is now. From the viewpoint of, say, the University of Texas, the numbers doubtless would look modest; from the viewpoint of a private university, they're enormous. The faculty's early vision of instant implementation has therefore gracefully clarified itself into a three-year, phased plan.

Anyone seriously involved with college composition knows that a program's administrative structure tells almost as much about it as its curriculum does, because hierarchies and interlacings of authority both affect and are affected by the perceptions the institution has of the composition program as a fiscal and political entity—and those, in turn, help to define its educational shape. At NYU the writing program has developed out of two predecessors: one, the previous composition course, wholly encapsulated, administratively, in the English department of the College of Arts and Science; and the other, a broadly representative Study Group on English Expression, which, after a year of consultation and deliberation, proposed the ambitious design now being realized. The Study Group, co-chaired by the chairman of the English department and a professor of film and television in the School of the Arts, provided for its own perpetuation, in effect, by building into its scheme an inter-school committee, composed of faculty from all schools whose students enroll in the writing program. This committee is charged with monitoring the program and advising its director, who is answerable to it on the one hand, and to the chairman of the English department, where the program is based, on the other. Faculty and graduate assistants teaching in the program may come from any school and department; nine departments in four different schools are represented in 1978-79. Appointments of graduate assistants are, however, specifically in the English department and made by its chairman; the director of the program is a professor of English, and her administrative staff is part of the same department. But when faculty members from other depart-

ments and schools teach sections of the Writing Workshop, it is the Expository Writing Program, as a budgetary unit of the College of Arts and Science, that “buys” their time from their home departments.

These interrelations may sound oddly complicated, perhaps even illogical; but they’re not chaotic nor merely political. At a university where interdepartmental programs lack good and strong precedent, a firm connection with the relevant department is essential not only to the program’s credibility, but to its day-by-day, and even more, its year-by-year operation. At the same time, where the English department has for some years treated composition as purely a service course and a way of helping to support its graduate students, it’s important that a revised and upgraded writing program have a broad, effective, and officially recognized authority extending beyond its departmental base. The term authority is the proper one in this case, since NYU’s institutional style is friendly to autocratic governance in its subsystems. That style is what balances the complex of answerabilities; to put it another way, if one is head of a subsystem, one is likely to have the power to do what one is held responsible for doing. Nowhere is this more important than in the design of the curricula; if the administrative structure is the program’s bones, the classroom teaching is its vital innards.

Except for the exceptions to allow some flexibility for experienced instructors, teaching follows detailed prescribed syllabi. The syllabi differ, in the first semester, according to the designated ability-levels of the students: Honors, Regular, or Developmental. This year, the three levels accounted, respectively, for about 15, 60, and 25 percent of the incoming students. The Honors and Developmental syllabi are variations of the Regular one, which is founded on three basic ideas about writing and about college freshmen. First is an idea about audience: the Writing Workshop’s motto is Jacques Barzun’s remark that “the only valid motivation for writing well is the desire to be read.” Now, whatever the psychological and social reasons, the desire to be read—and given a good grade—by one’s English teacher is not, for most college freshmen, the same as a desire to be read in general. The latter desire is difficult for many freshmen even to imagine, just yet, because they are only beginning to identify themselves as public people—“public” meaning as a real part of a society larger and more anonymous than one’s school, one’s neighborhood, one’s family. The more sophisticated students can conceive and write for an imaginary audience, if it is clearly identified and defined in terms of the verbal style it is postulated to expect; but even for these students a transitional audience is helpful. The Writing

Workshop teachers therefore take advantage of the blessedly small size of classes, and during about half of the class sessions, divide students into small groups of four or five, so that students can provide a face-to-face audience for one another.

What goes on in the small group meetings is closely linked to a second basic idea about writing, namely, that most college freshmen do not have much idea of how to get from a vague notion of a topic to a fully articulated and carefully edited piece of prose discourse. So, each “full-dress” paper goes through a structured series of stages, usually four during the early weeks of the course, reducing to three or two in the later weeks. The maximum, four-stage sequence goes like this: the student settles on something to write about, with more or less explicit guidance from the instructor, and puts down his first thoughts about it. Usually the first thoughts are continuous prose, perhaps inappropriately called “first,” but they may take the form of extended notes or associative jottings. This first draft the student brings to class and reads, aloud, to his response group, the members of which then comment on it in turn. Exactly how the response sessions are structured varies from one class to another, and from time to time in the same class as teachers experiment with methods; but groups have in most cases begun with a set of rules derived from Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*: reading, followed by a timed minute of silence, then uninterrupted and unanswered remarks from each group member in turn. Elbow’s formal, almost meditative plan helps to insulate students from their own uneasiness right at first; it also puts a needed emphasis on careful listening and a respect for thoughtful periods of silence. Some instructors find that rigid timing and denying the writer a chance to talk back continue to be useful to the groups; others prefer to allow interchange. All have discovered that, in a course devoted to mainly factual prose, student groups profit from various kinds of guidelines that help them understand what to listen for and how to respond constructively. For instance, a teacher may, with the whole class, present a draft of his own writing, and ask for advice about it; the teacher’s questions thus lead students to notice and try to deal with important features not only of the teacher’s draft but, subsequently, of a fellow-student’s. Or an instructor may use a duplicated set of questions to ask about a piece of writing, and go over these whenever it seems a good idea to remind students how they can be more useful critics. Typically, sets of questions begin with the whole—“What is the writer’s main point?”—and work down to details of diction and usage. Whatever the specifics of the method, the

face-to-face reading and response is one constant method of dealing with first drafts.

The writer then revises on the bases of the responses he has listened to and of his own further thinking, and presents written copies of the revised paper to the other group members, who now make comments in writing. This has been the weakest phase in the series; it's hard to say just why. Possibly it's that it seems redundant to comment in writing after one has already commented orally; possibly the process of written commentary needs to be better understood and specified. Or both; plus some other problems not yet isolated. Even at its most nearly otiose, though, the second stage gives an opportunity for interim revision which can go as far as a complete re-thinking of the topic or the adoption of a new one.

In its third version, the paper comes for the first time to the instructor; this is the next-to-final stage. At this point, *not* the final stage, the instructor makes detailed written comments on the student's work. This, all agree, seems a great improvement, given the larger context of sharing and responding, over the more common procedure in which the student hands the instructor a paper that both agree is finished. In that practice, the instructor's comments are paradoxically framed: they typically suggest revision, even though no further revision has been provided for or will ordinarily be done. For the instructor to remark on a *next*-to-final paper resolves the paradox, but potentially raises another, dramatized in the occasional student complaint, "But I did everything you said; why isn't it an A?" That such complaints have been few may testify to the care that instructors take to forestall them. One technique is not to re-write or to correct errors. Instead, one gives a reaction—not just "awk," but an articulation of one's troubles, as a reader, with tangled syntax or inconsistent diction or missing connectives. For usage, the instructor makes a reference to the handbook or a remark like "There are two comma splices on this page; correct them." Another technique of keeping the student responsible for his work is to explain, either on the paper or if it is a more general policy, in class, that one cannot, after all, mark everything; this time, one is concentrating, for instance, on adequate support for generalizations. Matters of diction, or whatever, will have to wait.

After the stages of peer response and teacher's response, the student prepares his final paper. It must be typewritten; and the explicit expectation—met more often than one might suppose—is that it be press-perfect, free even from typos. On this copy the instructor red-pencils

errors, but makes no suggestions or marginalia; only a holistic evaluation and a grade. Students, with some restrictions, choose seven such papers out of from nine to eleven written during the term to make up their “portfolio,” on which most of the semester grade is based. Obviously, the work on successive projects must overlap if each one goes through even three of the four stages. The overlapping has in this first, experimental semester sometimes become excessive; but in principle it has some advantages. If a student is going to stay with one paper through several drafts, it’s more interesting not to have to concentrate on that paper exclusively. Most of us produce better writing in the end if we have a chance to lay our work aside and do something else, even if only for a few days, before we come back to it.

Besides audience and process, the third basic idea informing the Writing Workshop course has to do with cognitive development. The common failure of college freshmen to support their generalizations is probably not the laziness or stupidity it is sometimes taken for. Rather, these very young adults have not yet fully mastered the movements of intellect that take one from general to particular or from abstract to concrete, and back again. Their immaturity in this respect is perhaps not even entirely cognitive; it has to do also with psychosocial development. Insofar as there is such a creature as a typical American college freshman, she is a young person just now becoming effectively aware of herself as a distinct but social being, upon whom others justly expect to be able to rely, but whose place and viewpoint is never fully shared by any of those others. The failure to state one’s premises or to cite one’s evidence can result both from being unaccustomed to the peculiar explicitness that abstract thought requires and from incomplete social recognition—the recognition that another person can read only one’s words, not one’s mind.

Assignments in the Writing Workshop are not always spelled out; in the shared syllabus some are left to the students, some to the inclinations of each instructor. But those that are in common ask that students exercise their thinking in the general-particular and abstract-concrete dimensions. For instance, a described observation will become the basis for particular, then for general inference. Or a brainstorming session, pre-writing, will be guided into the development of *categories* of questions and subtopics, in relation either to an initial abstraction or to a concrete object or event. Or students are asked to write a dialogue, either reported or imagined, that represents some characteristic of their group’s interaction, then to explicate the characteristic that has been represented.

This exercise may, for the sake of tact, be written up without peer response.

The Regular level course, in the first semester, has a Developmental variant, which differs principally in that students write only seven papers and more time is spent in “plenary” session—lecture and discussion involving the entire class. NYU’s Developmental level is not “remedial,” in the way that an open-admissions college understands the word; it is merely paced a little slower, and bent a little more toward traditional teacherliness than the Regular level. By the beginning of second semester, students in Developmental sections are supposed to be ready to enter Regular classes, since the Developmental level then ceases to exist. Whether this expectation is reasonable remains to be seen. Because a cut-off score of 500 on the SAT-Verbal is the chief criterion for downward placement, and because, as everyone knows, this is not the surest measure of proficiency in writing, differences between students’ ability at these two levels is frequently not apparent; so the disappearance of the Developmental sections may not be an inconsistent plan.

The Honors level continues through the year as virtually a separate course, though it bears the same catalogue number as the other two. The three R’s—reading, response, revision—inform it also; but Honors sections use a more substantial and challenging anthology, give more attention to the connections of verbal style with rhetorical role-playing, and practice defining and addressing imaginary audiences from sundry stances. The first-semester Honors course is being adapted as the second-semester Regular course in the Humanities division; Honors students in the second semester go into a more individualized course pattern, frequently working, with their class as well as with the instructor, according to personal contracts agreed upon early in the term.

The division of the Regular level into three areas of interest during the second semester demands a careful balancing of specialization with the fact that Writing Workshop must remain fairly inclusive in its approach. Students in the Natural Sciences division may be pre-med, as are the majority, or may be in nursing or accounting or mathematics or goodness knows what. Similarly, students in the Social Sciences division may be coming from business or social work or education or pre-law or psychology or whatever, just as Humanities students may be prospective majors in drama or French or film or music or English or what have you. Obviously, such broad ranges of interest would be ill-served by too narrowly defined a course; business or technical writing as such has simply to be offered to upperclassmen by departments that wish to do so.

A further reason for relative non-specialization is that the faculty and graduate students who teach Writing Workshop, though they come from several departments, are—as yet—none of them farther from the humanities than English Education or ESL. There are no scientists nor technical writing teachers on the Natural Sciences staff, no social scientists nor business writing teachers on the Social Sciences staff. That faculty members in these fields act as advisers to the graduate assistants is helpful and reassuring; but it does not change the fundamental fact. The challenge, then, is to develop courses that honestly address broad areas of interest, but that can be taught confidently and well by laymen in those areas.

The initial solutions to this problem will no doubt be revised from year to year; at present, the compromise syllabi are centered each on a general notion or set of notions. The outline for Natural Sciences makes use of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by introducing, first, readings in "normal science," then spending several weeks on the Darwinian revolution in biology, and turning finally to two or three current issues in the relation of science and society. Instead of a multiplicity of small essays, students write three more extended papers, all requiring research, and a collection of 250-word abstracts of assigned readings. Along the way, attention focuses on such rhetorical matters as the establishment of authority in discourse that purports to be factual, and on the options for sequencing and filling out semi-technical explanation. The Social Sciences course concentrates on the logic and psychology of persuasion, from formal inference to the slier ploys of advertizing and political journalism.

As we follow the calendar into second semester, a good many questions remain unanswered. Presumably most students are writing better now than they did in September; but the haste with which the writing program was brought into being ruled out the possibility of a pre-test that might have served for comparison. There will, however, be a final essay examination, which can become, among other things, a pre-test for second semester; it may help to confirm or refute scattered skepticism about the need to require a full year of composition. But evaluative study must, plainly, go much further. The most urgent needs are for a reliable placement measure, for ways to devise a consistent means of grading, and for comparative evaluation of the workshop method with other, both more and less radical, pedagogic techniques.

For the moment, evaluation of the first semester is anecdotal. Most of the teachers have moved from initial doubts and uneasiness to a degree of

faith in and comfort with student-centered instruction. Student reactions show every imaginable degree and kind of approval and disapproval. Interestingly, though, the reactions usually show careful thought; perhaps partly because the course itself puts responsibility on them, students undertake criticisms of it seriously and responsibly. For example:

If I were to describe my feelings for the course in one word I would use “frustrating.” . . . It’s not until the third copy of a paper that someone we trust will read it. . . . On certain days, we hear a lecture on rules and techniques we have learned in the past, but forget to use in our writing. Although these things are important to hear, my mind selects those things that apply to me to listen to. I think this time could be more individualized, so we’re *sure* when a rule applies to us.

Over the past twelve weeks, with the help of the rest of my group, I feel that I’ve learned more about the skills of good writing than I have over the other twelve years of my education. My group consisted of friendly and honest individuals who contributed their unbiased opinion about my work. . . . The constant improving of papers has developed my skills in communicating to my peers and hopefully others.

In the area of criticizing and annotating each other’s papers I find that we are much too lenient with each other. This is possibly due to the sprouting of friendships throughout the year. . . . The groups should indeed be more stern with each other, for it is to the benefit of all.

The constant work does, of course, help get rid of writing problems acquired from lack of writing consistently, and also improves grammar and word usage. I simply question the necessity of the constant wave of work assigned. . . . Perhaps I don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I knew most of the rules of writing when I started this course. What I need now is practice in the actual writing of an essay. In my opinion, the fact that we write so many drafts of so many essays is the greatest asset of this course.

Although I think this system [of working over essays] is very tedious, I enjoy the course sometimes. . . . My group didn’t work well until we got to know each other because we found it hard to criticize each other’s essays. We didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings so we wrote on the annotated copies statements such as “It’s nice,” or “I really enjoyed reading this.” We weren’t lying but we also were afraid to give suggestions for

improvement. After half the semester is over, we are now writing true criticisms on each other's essays since we are comfortable in our group.

I have benefitted most from this course by working in a group because I have learned to take criticism from other people and to use it to my advantage rather than become insulted Nevertheless I don't enjoy having to write one essay over four times.

There are, so far as I know, no widely shared student criticisms of the writing program, as differentiated from complaints about and praise of particular teachers, that are not represented in this set of comments. The comments are typical also in their thoughtfulness; to the anxious question about this new course, "Is it working?" the very fact that students find it worth such judicious evaluation is a strong, if incomplete, affirmative answer.

How exportable the NYU program is, however, is another question; graduate assistants who have tried its methods at, for instance, community colleges in the city, report that the relative success at NYU is in part due to NYU students' relatively high degree of motivation and self-discipline. On the other hand, peer interaction has proven valuable in a great variety of institutional settings; given further refinement and appropriate modification, the NYU syllabus may prove widely adaptable. No single component of it, after all, is original, though the combination may be so.

The students' observation that "high school English was never like this" is matched by teachers' observations that "composition teaching was never like this." Many of the fifty-six first-semester Graduate Assistants had had experience as college, community college, or high school teachers; but only two or three had ever worked in a student-centered course. The first need in September, therefore, was for a crash program of orientation for teachers. We met for three days, sometimes all together, sometimes divided into the three levels, studying and discussing course outlines, practicing comments on student papers, working out through sharing some of our anticipatory worries. The most valuable part of the orientation, by all accounts, was a role-playing exercise that took up the entire afternoon of the first day. The whole staff, including the participating faculty members, began by talking together about problems they expected to encounter and about the advantages and disadvantages that the student groups might offer. Then, very like a freshman class, the teachers wrote for half an hour about their hopes and fears for the course. A break for chatter and coffee; then the

return, this time into groups of four or five, to read, listen, and respond to one another's "in-class essays." Two of the student comments quoted earlier indicate some of what happened to their teachers, as well: we began by being very nice to each other. Only gradually, and not in every group, did we become able to listen acutely and to zero in on one another's writing. But we did learn, quickly, how it felt to engage in this kind of learning; and further discussion afterwards helped to analyze what had gone on, to predict and plan for what was for most of the participants a very new kind of classroom procedure. During the semester the staff has met fairly frequently in four divisions, to share problems and solutions and information; less frequently, there have been "business meetings" of the entire staff. Informal cross-grading of papers is frequent, encouraged by a more formal cross-grading exercise carried out in groups of three. Vagaries of judgment are more frequent than could ideally be wished; but, by and large, instructors agree surprisingly well, especially in their assessment of the *relative* merits of student essays. Supervision and in-service training, however, need to be strengthened and better organized—a virtual impossibility this year because there aren't enough people to run a program of the size of this one; a single full-time faculty member, one half-time adjunct instructor, and a secretary made up the entire administrative staff in fall '78. For spring, a second secretary and a half-time research assistant will be added; and in September '79, in further addition to this enlarged group, a full-time assistant director. Bearing in mind Parkinson's Law, we aim, beyond this, for a third faculty member in 1980—but no more. With careful organization, the regular faculty who teach sections of Writing Workshop and the Graduate Assistants who already have experience in the course can share the responsibility of a less centralized supervisory plan. Even in the first semester, the participating regular faculty have made class visitations, chaired certain meetings, and been available for advice and moral support for the Assistants.

Brand-new Assistants, for the second year now, have been required to take a graduate course in the teaching of college composition, offered in two sections, one in English and one in English Education—an arrangement that indicates a tentative but growing measure of cooperation between these two departments. Most Graduate Assistants report that the course is valuable; but its value is qualified by its need to do too many things—theory, research, and practice—all at once. Next year the course will perform a kind of mitosis, into a fall-term practicum, required of new teachers and given by professors of English Education;

and a spring term theory course (an impracticum, one might say) offered in the English department, and strongly urged upon any Graduate Assistants who lack formal course work in contemporary rhetoric. Eventually, if all goes well, it should be possible to complement teaching in the undergraduate program with an optional concentration in rhetoric as part of doctoral study in English. How far in the future that option waits—if indeed it waits there at all—and just what shape it may take, can in this early time only be guessed. Even the future of the undergraduate program may be less simple than I have presented it here, because, from the very beginning of its planning, expository writing has been conceived as a part of a revived general education requirement. The writing course has come into being first, since it was felt to be urgent, and thus was easy to agree upon. But more is to come—some of it, probably, as soon as next fall—and it isn't clear whether expository writing will remain a completely distinct entity or be integrated in some way, to some measure, with a fully specified set of distribution requirements. In any case, the writing program's continuing self-examination through both statistical and case study methods may offer useful information for other institutions and programs.

Mary Epes
Carolyn Kirkpatrick
and Michael G. Southwell

THE COMP-LAB PROJECT: AN EXPERIMENTAL BASIC WRITING COURSE

The COMP-LAB Project, now in its third year of operation at York College of The City University of New York, is an experimental program in basic writing. In the course, two classroom hours are systematically coordinated with a flexible schedule of work in an autotutorial writing laboratory, where students work on their own, not in a one-to-one relationship with a tutor. The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education has funded the development of the course, and the Exxon Education Foundation is underwriting its evaluation. At present the program has been adopted experimentally at two other sites, Metropolitan Community College in Minneapolis, and South Central Community College in New Haven.

We developed this program in response to a dual need, namely, to find (1) a *better* way to solve the most serious writing problems of nontraditional students at CUNY and elsewhere, and (2) a *cheaper* way to do that in face of shrinking budgets for remedial courses.

FOR WHOM THE PROGRAM IS DESIGNED

The population for which we developed the program is well-represented by Jerry Richards,¹ who wrote this paper on the first day of his English 100 class at York College:

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1. Although the author's name is not real, his paper is, and it is reproduced here exactly as he wrote it; nothing has been deleted, changed, or added, except the numbers preceding each group of words punctuated as a sentence.

¹ Poverty is a source of loneliness, sickness and even death, loneliness to mean a big suffering for children without freinds. ² A child who want to go to the movies or to the circus but there parent's dosen't make enough money So he have to sit on the stairs of the house and people go by. ³ Because the park is 5 miles away loneliness is a little boy who mother and father work all day and start arguing at each other and not knowing that they have a child, or they feel sorry for even having it.

⁴ Sickness and death have a big effect on poverty childrens. ⁵ Some die because they don't got enough to eat they too many in the family to feed.

⁶ The clothing the children wear are not warm enough. ⁷ The poor housing the window are broke and radiator are not working. ⁸ Babies catch amonia and die little children starve so bad and start eating the chips off the wall.

⁹ The family don't get a examination every year. ¹⁰ Poverty in these to sources loneliness and sickness and death are have a very bad effect on children.

There are probably many instructors who would try to help Jerry by marking every error in this paper in red, with precise references to 2b, 6a(4), 9f, etc., in the *Harbrace College Handbook*. Let us hypothesize that Jerry has such an instructor, who returns the bloody paper to him at the next class meeting. So Jerry stares at it for a couple of minutes, smiles ruefully, mumbles, "I always was a terrible speller" (actually Jerry is quite a good speller), and stuffs it into his notebook. The likelihood that he will look at it again is remote.

Even though Jerry doesn't want to see his paper again, let's take another look at it. It may not be obvious that, for a basic writing student, Jerry has superior rhetorical skills. Below is an outline of the paper's rhetorical structure:

Poverty is a source of loneliness, sickness, and even death [My topic is poverty and its psychological and physical effects on small children.] loneliness to mean a big suffering for children without freinds. [I begin by defining a major psychological effect, loneliness.] A child who want to go to the movies or to the circus but there parent's dosen't make enough money So he have to sit on the stairs of the house and people go by. Because the park is 5 miles away loneliness is a little boy who mother and father work all day and start arguing at each other and not knowing that they have a child, or they feel sorry for even having it. [I give three examples of the loneliness caused by poverty.]

Sickness and death have a very big effect on poverty childrens. [In my second paragraph I deal with the physical effects of poverty on small children; I begin with some obvious examples.] Some die because they

don't got enough to eat they too many in the family to feed. The clothing the children wear are not warm enough. The poor housing the window are broke and radiator are not working. Babies catch amonia and die little children starve so bad and start eating the chips off the wall. The family don't get a examination every year. [Under the general heading of poor housing, I mention some particularly pathetic consequences of poverty for small children; I have saved the most affecting for the last. (*Note: The intrusion of yet one more obvious example somewhat spoils this effect.*)] Poverty in these to sources loneliness and sickness and death are have a very bad effect on children. [As a conclusion, I recapitulate my main idea.]

Inexperienced readers of the writing of nontraditional students are unlikely to notice these solid virtues of Jerry's paper. For, despite his fine sense of rhetorical structure, he has sinned against two common scribal conventions (writing *So* for *so* and *5* for *five*), misspelled three words, made twenty word-form errors, and, in six out of ten attempts, failed to produce a syntactically correct or complete sentence. Many of these problems would seem to be related to nonstandard speech habits.

Students with such severe writing problems have little chance of surviving in college, no matter how basically intelligent their papers may be. But in our experience, students like Jerry can finish the COMP-LAB course writing almost error-free papers. And other students with comparable word-form and syntactic problems, but less rhetorical sophistication, can also make big gains both in correctness and fluency. The evaluation now in progress is designed to assess the overall success of the program.²

THE LABORATORY COMPONENT

The Self-Instructional Method. Jerry's writing problems fall under three headings—word-form correctness, syntax, and rhetoric. In the latter, he happens to have a flying start, but of course most basic writing students do write much more disorganized or underdeveloped papers. And so all three needs must be addressed in a basic writing program. The genesis of the COMP-LAB program was in the intuition, which over the past three

2. We had thought of reproducing here one of Jerry's later papers. But any claims based on isolated examples are misleading, however gratifying they might be. Our purpose in this article is simply to describe what the COMP-LAB program is designed to do. Later we will report on what, as a matter of fact, it does do.

years has grown into a conviction, that the first of these needs, word-form error, is best dealt with in a laboratory setting, where each student works by himself on self-instructional materials. (We'll discuss instruction in syntax and rhetoric later in this paper.)

At York College, English 100 has consisted of five instructional hours. In experimental sections using the COMP-LAB program, classroom hours have been reduced to two, and students go to the lab any time between 9 AM and 9 PM, Monday through Friday, to work on grammatical problems for as long as necessary to complete the weekly assignment; for most students, this is about four hours a week. A lab supervisor supplies materials and occasionally answers questions about content or procedure.

Each module, or weekly unit of work, focuses on a single grammatical feature. Students first listen to a brief audiocassette tape, and do accompanying practice exercises which deal with the elementary conceptual material of the module. Students then work their way through a series of written exercises of ever-increasing complexity. They themselves check each exercise against an answer sheet before they go on to the next.

Why is this self-instructional, self-paced learning method, employing audiotapes and written exercises, a better way to deal with students' word-form error than the traditional classroom approach? There are at least five reasons, related both to the kind of material being learned and the kind of student learning it. Conceptually, this grammatical material is easy; but for basic writing students, it is above all this "easy" material which they find enormously difficult to internalize and apply.

The five reasons for the success of this learning method with this material for these students are: (1) Students in college basic writing courses have encountered some of the course material as far back as the third grade. But some remember one thing, some another; some learn quickly, some slowly. When a grammar lesson is presented to a group, individual students are variously confused, bored, or even embarrassed. In the lab, students can replay a tape as often as necessary and spend as little or as much time on a written exercise as they wish. The lab thus provides a dignified and flexible environment for remedial instruction in grammar. (2) Many, if not most, of the biggest problems of basic writing students seem to be caused by their nonstandard speech habits. Audiotapes, coordinated with printed exercises, enable students to simultaneously *hear, see, pronounce,* and *write* grammatical forms. This process draws their attention to the grammatical forms required in

standard written English, and to the differences between what they may say and what they are expected to write. In the privacy of a carrel, students can profit from this experience without embarrassment. (3) While cognitive grasp of the rules is essential, students do not arrive at this understanding by listening to abstract formulations. In the classroom, the instructor must choose between presenting such formulations, or leading the class, step by step, to discovering a rule. Either way—even if the teacher resists the teacherly temptation to tell more than his students need to know—there is little chance for them to internalize the rule through practice. In the lab, only the most elementary formulations are presented initially, with an absolute minimum of technical language. Understanding comes partly through applying the rule over and over, manipulating forms in varied and increasingly difficult contexts. Understanding comes also through students' checking their own performance against answer sheets, thus learning to recognize both correct and incorrect forms. (4) Students working on their own can do much more work than could be assigned for homework. Even if a classroom instructor were to assign as large a quantity of homework as students can do in the lab, he probably could not mark all of it. Furthermore, students would lose the immediate feedback which comes from checking their own work. In the lab, students are constantly and instantly aware of what they have learned and what they have not yet learned. (5) In the classroom, especially if the material is technical, learning tends to be passive; the teacher is the fountainhead, students the receptacles, of wisdom. In the lab, students are active. They get a tiny piece of information and a concise instruction. Then immediately they must *do* something to prove they have understood. If they don't pay attention all the time, they quickly realize they are wasting their own precious time.

There is one additional reason why we feel our autotutorial laboratory method is good for nontraditional students: it develops their self-reliance in two important ways. (1) In a classroom, the teacher assumes most of the responsibility for students' learning. But in our lab, both the materials and the procedures place the responsibility for learning squarely on the students themselves. The COMP-LAB exercises are so constructed that students who do the modules with care can almost always do them successfully. And lab procedures are designed to bring home to students their own responsibility for this learning. In the lab, students punch in and out on a time clock. Lab attendance is not required, but every Monday, each student gets a weekly report: he spent

so many hours in the lab, *it* says; he did or did not finish the assigned work; he did or did not score it accurately (it is spot-checked by the lab supervisors). These are facts: he knows them, and he knows his teacher knows them. There can be no evasion of responsibility. This weekly report documents students' efforts in the lab. Students are rightly gratified by this recognition, and are encouraged to keep up those efforts. It is particularly important for these nontraditional students to feel, for perhaps the first time, in control of their own learning. (2) And these students need to learn how to read, understand, and follow instructions by themselves. The COMP-LAB procedures and materials demand that students develop these basic skills quickly; at the same time, they foster the development of these skills, by providing a structure in which students are moved forward by such tiny incremental steps that virtually all of them can experience success.

The Laboratory Materials. Over the last three years, we have developed all the audiotape and written materials used in the lab. We have focussed each module on a separate and distinct grammatical feature, though the last exercises in any module always review previous learning. At this time, the modules are assigned in the following order:

- Module 1: Scribal Conventions [very basic conventions about the arrangement of words on paper—indenting, capitalization, abbreviating, etc.]
- Module 2: Wrong Words [common homonyms and word-class errors]
- Module 3: Noun Plural Forms
- Module 4: Verb Agreement [simple present-tense verbs, exclusive of BE]
- Module 5: The verb BE [present and past tenses]
- Module 6: Past-tense Verb Forms [the simple past tense]
- Module 7: Sentence Construction [the sentence kernel, plus expansion]
- Module 8: Verb Phrases with HAVE
- Module 9: Verb Phrases with BE
- Module 10: Other Verb Phrases [with DO and modals]
- Module 11: Sentence Punctuation [avoiding fragments, comma splices, and run-ons]
- Module 12: Pronouns
- Module 13: Noun Possessives

Within each module, the majority of exercises ask students to use the feature in sentence and paragraph contexts. Only the first few exercises use the standard fill-in-the-blanks method, and then only as a check on

students' basic understanding of the rule. The students begin to use the feature in increasingly difficult contexts. They progress from writing words, to writing sentences, and finally to writing entire paragraphs. The final exercise in each module, the only one marked by the instructor, requires students to demonstrate their control over the feature in a paper of their own composing; the instructions are such that students cannot avoid using the feature they have been studying all week.

Each individual exercise demands just *one* thing; each moves students one exquisitely small step (so small that they can hardly fail to take it successfully) along their journey from mere cognitive grasp of the rule to its habitual application in their own writing. And each exercise is incremental; that is, it functions as the necessary bridge between the preceding and the following exercises.

The techniques employed in these exercises are drawn from a wide variety of sources: the most successful ESL techniques, like controlled composition and contrastive learning approaches; sentence combining; X-word grammar; and the discoveries of individual classroom teachers.³ We have frequently adapted these methods to new purposes, perhaps not anticipated by their inventors. For example, we use sentence combining techniques to reinforce word-form correctness, not to develop stylistic variation. If students learn to write more gracefully and concisely, as well as more correctly, that is a bonus.

Most important of all, we have, in all our exercises, adapted successful classroom techniques to the autotutorial method, in which it is essential that students be able to check their own work. For example, we have refined the technique of controlled composition to the point where we can isolate a single feature or group of features for specific manipulations which yield one invariant response.

In working their way through the COMP-LAB exercises, students produce reams of transformed phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, all in service of word-form correctness and basic syntax. In this process, they are inevitably absorbing much about paragraph organization, development, and style. They may even be learning how to read.

3. We wish to acknowledge our debt to experimenters like Linda Kunz, Sarah D'Eloia, Patricia Laurence, David Davidson, and many other CUNY teachers, and to Ruth Otto and William Jones of Rutgers University. We are particularly indebted to Carolyn Gilboa of Lehman College, CUNY, for sharing her linguistic insights with us.

THE CLASSROOM COMPONENT

In spite of all we have said about the benefits of the autotutorial laboratory, we know that the classroom is equally important—or even more important. Every learner needs to know that there is some person who knows and cares about what he is learning, and who can tell him with a human voice that he is in fact learning it. Even though there is little need to mention grammar in the classroom, and we seldom do, the word-form exercises would probably be much less effective if the classroom did not exist.

In the lab, what students learn are essentially editing skills.⁴ There they develop and sharpen these skills on materials we provide. But before students can apply their editing skills to their own writing, they must first learn to compose, to create their own materials; and, of course, this is best done under the guidance of a teacher in the classroom. The difficulty is convincing students that composing and editing are entirely different processes, so different, in fact, that they tend to derail each other when performed simultaneously. Learning them in two separate arenas helps students to understand this difference.

So does free writing. Free writing may be described as the writing students, or any writers, do for themselves. They may or may not wish to show it to someone, but their main motivation, at the time of writing, is simply to get ideas from their heads onto paper. They are not concerned about an audience or the form of what they write, but just about getting their thoughts down on the page. Free writing gives students confidence that they can do this, helps them enjoy the process of doing it, and develops their ability to do it quickly and spontaneously; in other words, it develops fluent writing, as distinct from correct writing.⁵

Free writing has an important part to play in a course like this one, with its heavy stress on correctness. It helps students learn that writing is not merely a means of communicating with others, but also an expressive vehicle for ideas and emotions which are in themselves significant to the writer. This is the kind of writing that students can care about; and when they care, they can begin to care about writing correctly.

4. Readers need to bear in mind that what for them may be mere proofreading is truly editing for the basic writing student.

5. For readers unfamiliar with free writing, we think the best two sources are Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and Michael G. Southwell's "Free Writing in the Composition Class," *College English*, 38 (1977), 676-81.

When drafting ideas for papers, students are urged to free write at first and then edit later. We try to convince students that free writing can help them get good ideas on paper fast, even though these ideas may need a lot of reorganizing and editing. Hence, emphasis on free writing can help students distinguish between the composing and the editing processes.

The second emphasis in the classroom is, of course, elementary rhetoric: isolating main ideas, supporting and developing them. Instructors are free to use whatever methods work best for them with basic writing students, but should resist any temptation to teach more advanced rhetorical concepts, like inductive versus deductive techniques of argumentation. It should be noted, though, that instructors actually have more opportunity to focus students' attention on content, since the burden of explaining grammatical concepts has been removed to the lab.

The third element of the classroom curriculum is syntax. Our model for sentence analysis is based on the approach used in the CUNY-SUNY videotape and workbook series, *The English Modules*:⁶ every sentence contains a sentence kernel—consisting of an unexpanded subject, an unexpanded verb, and perhaps a complement—plus expansion. Technical vocabulary is thus reduced to a minimum. With a thorough understanding of these few concepts, students are able to recognize and correct fragments, comma splices and run-ons, and confused sentences. Sentence exercises in the lab reinforce this classroom work. We discuss our use of this model of sentence analysis later, at the end of the section entitled “The Design of the Laboratory Materials.”

COORDINATION OF CLASSROOM AND LABORATORY: PAPER-MAKING AND GRADING

The course works as a whole only because students understand the close coordination between the lab and the classroom. They see the two parts of the course, composing and editing, come together in their own writing, which is the only thing that counts ultimately anyway. Instructors tell students on day one, and remind them frequently during the course, that doing the lab work is only a means to an end: unless what they are learning improves their own writing sufficiently, they cannot pass.

6. Sarah D'Eloia, Barbara Gray, Mina Shaughnessy, Blanche Skurnick, and Alice Trillin, *The English Modules* (New York: The State University of New York, 1976).

Let us use Jerry Richards' paper as an example of how the paper-making process integrates the work of the classroom and the work of the lab. This is Jerry's first formal paper. (He'll write ten over the semester.) When Jerry gets it back, the only errors marked on it will be spelling errors (*freinds*, *sory*, and *amonia*), as these are the only mistakes he can be expected, at this point, to know how to avoid. (Students are always permitted to use dictionaries.) In our system, errors like *there* for *their* and *to* for *two* are classified as wrong words, that is, words correctly spelled but misused in context. By the time Jerry writes Paper #3 he will have completed modules 1, 2, and 3. He will have learned about wrong words, about certain scribal conventions, and about noun plural forms. If he had submitted this paper as Paper #3, then, along with the spelling errors, these wrong words would be marked, as well as the scribal errors (like *5* for *five*), and noun plural errors (like *childrens* and *window*). A student as intelligent as Jerry, after doing the modules with care, might have eliminated these errors in the editing process before he handed in his paper. But if he did make them, he could understand every mistake marked on his paper. He would no longer feel helpless in the face of his own errors, but could correct them. And he is expected to correct them, by rewriting all sentences with errors and explaining each correction, using the rules he learned in the modules.

At all times students are keenly aware of the relationship between lab work and papers, and know that as soon as the deadline for completion of a module passes, they become responsible for editing their work for the feature covered. If a student is absent and falls behind in his lab work, an outcropping of errors marked on his next paper may spur him to catch up.

Students also understand that correctness is only a part of good writing. Their papers are marked not just for errors, but also for main ideas, development, clarity, and other points stressed in the classroom.

In our system, we distinguish between *marking* papers and *grading* them. Marking gives students feedback about their errors and the effectiveness of their writing. But they do not receive grades, which are an objective evaluation of their work against the standard of the course, until their last three papers. These are the grades on which the final grade in the course is based.

THE DESIGN OF THE LABORATORY MATERIALS

Without effective laboratory exercises dealing with students' actual problems, and dealing with them in the right order, this system could not

work. Students must understand certain word forms before they can do anything useful about their syntactic problems. Accordingly, after a brief introduction to scribal conventions, we begin with noun and verb forms, and only then address syntax.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the pertinence of the laboratory exercises is to refer again to Jerry's paper. The number over each italicized word-form error corresponds to the module in which he will learn to correct it. Errors in spelling and syntax, dealt with in other ways, are not marked here in the interest of clarity. An X over a word indicates that the word-form error is not dealt with specifically in the modules, either because it is not common in the writing of students in this course, or because it is not enough to be taught to the whole group. These errors would be explained individually, or ignored.

¹Poverty is a source of loneliness, sickness and even death, loneliness to mean a big suffering for children without freinds. ²A child who *want* to go to the movies or to the circus but *there* ¹²*parent's* ⁴*dozen't* make enough money *So* ¹he *have* to sit on the stairs of the house and people go by. ³Because the park is ⁵miles away loneliness is a little boy *who* mother and father work all day and start arguing at each other and not knowing that they have a child, or they feel sorry for ever having it.

⁴Sickness and death have a very big effect on *poverty* ³*childrens*. ⁵Some die because they don't *got* enough to eat *they* ⁵too many in the family to feed. ⁶The clothing the children wear *are* not warm enough. ⁷The poor housing the *window* are *broke* and *radiator* are not working. ⁸Babies catch amonia and die little children starve so *bad* and start eating the chips off the wall. ⁹The family *doA't* get *a* examination every year. ¹⁰Poverty in these *to* ²sources loneliness and sickness and death are *have* ⁹a very bad effect on children.

Module 2, Wrong Words, will help Jerry to correct errors like *to* for *two*. This relatively easy module is, to the student, a credible introduction to the necessity for word-form correction.

Making nouns plural may seem superficially easier, but it is much more difficult for students to do. Jerry's uncertain control over this Module 3 feature points to some anomalies which are entirely characteristic of basic writing students: he writes some difficult plurals correctly—*movies*, *babies*, *people*—and yet drops the *-s* from *window* and *radiator*; in word-group 1 he writes *children*, in word-group 4 the hypercorrect form *childrens*, and then *children* again in word-group 6; and in word-group 2 he includes a gratuitous apostrophe—immediately before a word in which he uses the apostrophe correctly. Clearly, the

grapholect has had a strong impact on Jerry's writing, but not strong enough to prevent dialect features from taking over when he is writing about down-home things (*window, radiator*), nor for him to distinguish consistently between correct and hypercorrect forms. What Jerry needs, and will get from Module 3, is not merely rules for pluralizing, which he plainly already knows, but a stronger sense of *noun-ness*. An exercise which asks him to rewrite sentences, by changing each noun from singular to plural, will help him to find nouns and learn to pluralize them correctly:

The man bought a guitar.⁷
The *men* bought *guitars*.

Or, in a paragraph:

A fashion design teacher recently sent her class to a local museum. In the portrait gallery one student saw a painting of a woman in an elaborate velvet dress and a hat as big as an umbrella. Another portrait showed a man wearing a huge white wig and a fancy ruffle from his neck to his waist. The student also found a picture of a baby dressed just like a little man, in a silk suit, a ruffled shirt, and a little white wig. The student decided that the overdressed man, woman, and child in that portrait gallery might be really interesting subject for her term paper.

Some fashion design *teachers* recently sent their *classes* to local *museums*. In the portrait *galleries* some. . .

Now that Jerry can identify a noun and its number, he is ready for the concept of the subject of a sentence. Module 4 teaches him how to make verbs in the simple present tense agree with their subjects. Although the specific focus of this module is on word forms, Jerry is also being introduced to syntax. Many of the exercises in this module require sentence manipulation; for example:

They drink wine with every meal.
She *drinks* wine with every meal.

7. All exercises or parts of exercises cited herein are Copyright © COMP-LAB 1978. Reprinted with permission. The COMP-LAB exercises will be published by Prentice-Hall in the fall of 1979.

Or:

Jesse and Butch rob banks.

Jesse robs banks.

Butch robs banks.

Or:

Lisa sings. She acts. She dances.

Lisa sings, acts, and dances.

Contrastive exercises help Jerry not to confuse new learning with old. For example, he may be asked to put a circle around noun plural endings and put a square around verb endings:⁸

New Yorker^o in European countries^o always admire the wonderful subway^o there. When a New Yorker enters^o the London tube^o or the Paris Metro, the cleanliness of the train^o startles^o him. He stops and stares at a maintenance man picking candy wrappers^o out of drains. With astonishment he watches a woman while she soaps down the tiled walls in the passageways, and polishes the brass railings in the stations. The comfort of the trains also seems strange. As he sinks into the cushioned seats, he thinks of the half-crushed straphangers back home. As he breathes the fresh air in the tunnels, he remembers the sweltering cars during New York summers. In the unfamiliar subways of Europe, with their excellent maps and directions, he never gets lost; but back home not even the conductor knows which train goes to Avenue S and which to Columbus Circle. Certainly, a New Yorker never gets homesick when he rides on European subways.

At this point Jerry probably needs some fence against incipient hypercorrection. Having learned not to write *he have to sit*, alas, like many basic writing students, he may begin to write *he has to sits*. So an exercise asks him to rewrite a paragraph in which all verbs appear in their

8. Patricia Laurence's exercises for students at The City College, CUNY, called our attention to the value of this kind of contrastive approach.

base forms, in capital letters. (This convention is familiar to him from previous exercises.) He must distinguish between the verb forms which need the inflection, and those which don't:

Somebody MAKE plans to BREAK most world records as soon as someone else SET them. When an athlete RUN the mile in under four minutes, his rival immediately START training to BEAT his time. When a woman SWIM around Manhattan in the summer, another TRY to do it in the winter. It MAKE sense to TRY to BREAK records like these, but some other attempts SEEM ridiculous. We GRIEVE if someone DIE trying to FLY fast, but it LOOK silly for him to EAT or to DANCE himself to death. In contests like these, foolish people often REFUSE to STOP. If a person HAVE to KILL himself, he KILL himself. At that moment, he WANT to DO just one thing—to DANCE longer, or to EAT more, or to SCREAM louder than anyone else in the world.

Somebody makes plans to break most world records as soon as someone

else sets them. An athlete runs the mile in. . .

Jerry's verb phrase errors are curious and wonderful: *the window are broke, sickness and death are have, they don't got*, and then, later, *the family don't get*. The latter variant forms (like Jerry's *childrens* and *children*) reflect the unsettling influence of either the standard forms or the grapholect, or both, on his own dialect, so that, at this stage of his growth as a writer, he is left without a consistent grammar to rely on. Jerry can begin to deal with this kind of problem only after he has single verb forms under control. But deal with it he must, for verb phrases, with their subtle and complex shades of meaning, are absolutely typical of the academic discourse which college students are learning to use. First, Jerry should work on the *forms* of verb phrases; an exercise which asks him to manipulate a sentence into different patterns starts him off:

William cooks manicotti every night.

NEGATIVE: *William doesn't cook manicotti every night.*

EMPHATIC: *William does cook manicotti every night.*

QUESTION: *Does William cook manicotti every night?*

A later exercise asks him to rewrite an entire paragraph in the negative, contracting each *not*:

Mickey has been a very satisfactory child. As an infant, he would eat his cereal. At two, he could feed himself. At four, he could tie his shoe laces. Now at six, Mickey is the star pupil in the first grade. He reads well and is very good at arithmetic. His teacher pastes gold stars on his papers. Furthermore, he can draw, he can sing, and he knows when to keep quiet. Mickey is a winner, and he even seems to know it. His parents are pleased with him. Mention his name. They will beam with pride.

Mickey hasn't been a very satisfactory child. As an infant, he wouldn't eat his cereal. At two, he couldn't feed. . .

Next, Jerry needs to understand the *meanings* residing in different kinds of verb phrases. And so he is asked to rewrite a short paragraph, changing tenses in accord with contextual clues:

WHAT DOES DUKE DO EVERY NIGHT?

Every night Duke makes dinner. As he tosses the salad, he drinks scotch. As he cooks the meat, he sips the cooking sherry. As he sets the table, he drinks half the wine.

WHAT DID DUKE DO LAST NIGHT?

Last night Duke made dinner. As he tossed the salad, he drank scotch.

As he cooked the meat, . . .

WHILE I WAS WATCHING TV LAST NIGHT, WHAT WAS DUKE DOING:

While I was watching TV last night, Duke was making dinner. As he was tossing the salad, he was drinking. . .

WHILE I'VE BEEN WATCHING TV, WHAT HAS DUKE BEEN DOING?

While I've been watching TV, Duke has been making dinner. As he has been tossing the salad, he has been. . .

Although syntax is primarily classroom work, certain important syntactic concepts are reinforced at strategic points throughout the lab

exercises. Jerry's problem with adjective clauses,⁹ for example, is typical (*A child who want to go to the movies or to the circus but. . .*). Jerry needs first to recognize adjective clauses as groups of words which expand nouns, and so an early exercise asks him simply to put parentheses around such groups of words, and draw arrows to the nouns they expand:

Players (who hesitate) miss their shots.

Next, when he has learned about verb agreement, Jerry needs to apply what he has learned both within and without the adjective clause. An exercise asks him to control verbs in the main clause:

HAVE The band (which plays for these dances) has
 either five or six members.

Another requires the same control inside the expansion:

LEAVE A teenager (who leaves home) often has financial
 problems.

Still later, mostly in the classroom, Jerry moves on to dealing directly with adjective clauses as a source of syntactic problems. He is led to understand that a noun plus an adjective clause does not constitute a sentence, but a fragment, and this is reinforced by lab exercises like this one, which asks him to identify this kind of expansion, and to label groups of words as sentences or fragments:¹⁰

9. It should be remembered that technical vocabulary is kept to a minimum; the words "adjective clause" would never be used with a student.

10. It's important to recognize the limits of the lab approach: lab exercises can help Jerry learn how to correct syntactic problems like these, by providing practice in using this model for sentence analysis. But he must apply it to *his own* sentences, and he can do this only with the help of a teacher.

¹ Animals have elaborate systems of movements and sounds (which resemble human communication.)	1. ..S
² Systems (which may or may not deserve the name language.)	2. ..F
³ Most animals certainly can communicate fear, pleasure, or sexual desire.	3. ..S
⁴ For example, the songs (which birds sing.)	4. ..F
⁵ Songs which have some of the qualities of human speech.	5.
⁶ Each melody which we hear signals food, danger, or a sense of territory.	6.
⁷ A man has studied the sounds which dolphins make.	6.
⁸ Curious underwater vibrations which are like the pulses of navy sonar equipment.	7.
⁹ This scientist considers these sounds the equivalent of human speech.	8.
¹⁰ And the complicated dance which bees perform.	9.
¹¹ These intricate movements tell other bees about sources of nectar.	10.
¹² Scientists who study animal communication are trying to find out if animals can learn actual human language.	11.
¹³ A woman who has devised a signal system which resembles the finger talk of deaf mutes.	12.
¹⁴ She taught it to a chimpanzee that now has a vocabulary of over 100 words.	13.
¹⁵ But no animal has used sounds or signals which are exactly like human language.	14.
¹⁶ Sounds which can express general and original ideas.	15.
	16.

The sequential and incremental quality of the COMP-LAB exercises is impossible to demonstrate in the space available to us here. But these few examples may serve to suggest the general principles underlying them all: isolating particular problems or pieces of information; crafty sequencing; and reinforcement of previous learning. We have borrowed techniques freely and widely. But our refinement of these techniques, combining and sequencing them, adapting them to the autotutorial method, and using them for new purposes, is, so far as we know, our own.

COST-SAVINGS

We hope to establish that the COMP-LAB course, with two hours of classroom instruction plus relatively inexpensive supervised lab work, can save instructional dollars for our college and others which may choose to adopt it. The amount of such savings depends, of course, on the number of classroom hours now devoted to basic writing, current

staffing patterns, and a variety of other factors. More important, though less obvious, are possible indirect institutional savings: the course provides considerable administrative and staffing flexibility, and it may produce higher student retention and pass rates.

CONCLUSION

The Exxon Education Foundation is supporting a thorough evaluation of the COMP-LAB Project by a team of outside evaluators. Students' writings will be measured holistically for overall quality and rates of errors will be counted. A conventional comparison-group experimental design has been set up, by means of which it will be possible to compare the performance of students in COMP-LAB sections with that of students in control sections at York and at the other two schools where this course has been adopted experimentally. In addition, students' and teachers' attitudes toward the experimental course, changes in students' attitudes toward writing, the adequacy of the transfer procedures, grade and retention data, and the cost of the course, will be measured. This evaluation is at least partially exploratory, since very little work has been done on the assessment of entire writing programs. Nevertheless, we do hope to be able to reach some reliable conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the COMP-LAB program.

In particular, we hope to show that a semester of intensive work on grammatical correctness need not harm, but rather can foster, students' rhetorical development. This is why students' writings will be evaluated by a holistic reading as well as by an error count. The notion that teaching standard written English to speakers of nonstandard dialects is harmful, both psychologically and educationally, has not died with the sixties. But we believe that our head-on assault on error has the opposite effect, a liberating one, on students who fear to put pen to paper, knowing that the *way* they write, regardless of *what* they write, exposes them to instant if unspoken derision.

And in some quarters, it *is* being spoken—loudly. Last winter, under the headline “Illiterates in the thousands passing through City College,” a *New York Post* reporter contrasted two types of students, the “illiterates” and the “bright” students, and he cited the following passage from a student's history paper to show how the “illiterates” differ from the “bright” students:

At first feudalism may have worked to the Kings advantages but as generations passed the new lords or vassals must have seen now reason to obey a king they possibly never saw. When the Duke of Normandy (William) in 1066 took England the King of France not only had a powerful lord breathing down his neck but now a country to deal with.

The French King dealt with it by not dealing with it. They just sat and took the crumbs from the Ducks. Then came a man named Phillip II. He did something. He attacked. Crushed all resistance in the north and drove his Norman vassal and now King of England into the sea.¹¹

Illiterate the writer of this paper may be; but he is obviously neither stupid nor uninformed: he gives a clear and convincing example of the breakdown of feudalism in France in the eleventh century.

This confounding of illiteracy with stupidity by the so-called educated public will not go away today or tomorrow or, perhaps, ever. The Conference on College Composition and Communication may advocate students' "right to their own language," but it's necessary to define the difference between spoken and written language. No one has the "right" to be scorned because he can't write in standard English, the medium through which our culture transmits so much of value to all. In the COMP-LAB program, we hope to demonstrate that at least the basics of this skill may be acquired by many students in one semester, and within current budgetary restrictions on remedial education.¹²

11. *New York Post*, 28 February 1978, p. 5.

12. The influence of Mina Shaughnessy has been everywhere present in these pages. For all we have learned from her and for her interest in our work, we are grateful.

Andrea A. Lunsford
and Sara Garnes

ANATOMY OF A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM

Like children, basic writing programs are conceived in one of two ways. The first is akin to the head-over-heels, urgently passionate affair which begets a large but generally unwanted brood. The other more resembles those staid lovers who weigh advantages, disadvantages, and consequences, who make careful plans before breaking into the baby business.

Too often, basic writing programs result from a momentary Dionysian revel or flirtation. Certainly, the dictates of a legislature or the mandates of a faculty are seductive siren songs, especially if they are orchestrated by immediate funding. But when the blush of romance fades, the tune turns into a cacophonous harping after accountability or cost efficiency, and the family, grown large and unruly, demands ever more time and attention.

Clearly unable to assume the guise of a lithe, hot-headed lover, the Ohio State University has preferred the less exciting but perhaps more prudent path toward adding a new member to its family. Hence, the University invested almost two years in research and testing before opening the Writing Workshop. What follows is a step-by-step description of how those two years were spent and a report on the current activities of the Workshop.

PLANNING: PHASE ONE

Our first planning phase began during Winter term, 1975-76, when a committee of the Faculty Senate of the College of Arts and Sciences recommended that the University consider offering remedial work in

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English. In response to that recommendation, we began to examine the issue of declining student writing abilities and to attempt answers to the following questions:

- (1) Have past remedial English courses at Ohio State University and elsewhere resulted in measurable student gains?
- (2) If not, why have they failed to do so?
- (3) Under what conditions is basic writing instruction likely to be effective?
- (4) How might our students' skills, processes, and attitudes toward writing be best described?

In July, 1976, these questions were partially answered in "Remedial English: A Descriptive and Evaluative Report."¹ We found that, at Ohio State, efforts at remedial instruction during the 1950's could not be characterized as successful. The failure rate generally hovered around thirty-three percent; combined percentages of D's and E's ran considerably higher. Few of those who completed the remedial course went on to finish the regular three-term English sequence. Similarly depressing pictures were painted by researchers from Florida, California, New York, Texas, and other parts of the country.

Tracing causes for failure was considerably more dangerous than documenting the failure. Nevertheless, some semblance of a pattern began to emerge from our study of our past efforts. In general, remedial classes were large and unwieldy: twenty-five to thirty-five students was the norm. Classes offered little time or space for one-to-one or small-group work. Teachers, who used only a traditional text-workbook, or sometimes a literary text, had few aids: no class-tested programmed texts, no tutors, no facilities with which to vary instructional mode or to integrate reading and writing skills, and no special training in the teaching of writing. Furthermore, the teachers were not volunteers but often reluctant draftees. Although we had no way of recapturing such elusive indicators as student motivation, we found that past efforts at remedial instruction at Ohio State University had few, if any, incentives

1. The pilot project is briefly reviewed in "What We Know—and Don't Know—About Remedial Writing," *College Composition and Communication*, 29 (February, 1978), 47 - 52, and more thoroughly described and analyzed in "Measurable Improvement in the Writing of Remedial College Students," ERIC Clearinghouse. Abstracted in *Resources in Education*, November 1978.

built into the program: students received no credit of any kind for the course; they were required to pay an extra fee; and they were clearly stigmatized as “boneheads.” Given the luxury of hindsight, we were rather amazed that even a small percentage of the remedial students managed to complete the freshman sequence successfully.

Based on our study of Ohio State University’s past programs, a survey of remedial programs at fifty-five colleges and universities, and careful study of a number of programs which had produced some positive results, we were able to offer a tentative answer to our third question, “Under what conditions is basic writing instruction likely to be effective?” by positing the following set of assumptions:

- (1) class size should be limited to fifteen and should be accompanied by individualized study in a writing workshop;
- (2) classes should be taught by trained and interested teachers who volunteer, rather than are assigned, to teach;
- (3) courses should carry some form of credit;
- (4) instruction should be informed by careful study of the student population to be served;
- (5) course goals and objectives should be clearly stated;
- (6) alternative learning materials and instructional modes should be available to students;
- (7) engagement in the full writing process should be the core rather than the end goal of the course(s).
- (8) courses should include a reduced-pace, two-quarter option.

We attempted to answer our fourth question, “How might our students’ skills, processes, and attitudes toward writing best be described?” in several ways. We knew that the mean ACT English scores had dropped two full points since 1969 at Ohio State. An informal faculty poll corroborated that decline: a majority of the faculty members surveyed believed that the ability of their students to express thoughts clearly in writing had diminished in the past five years. Furthermore, a diagnostic paragraph exercise administered to Freshman English students at the beginning of three consecutive terms revealed that thirty percent of the students *each term* were unable to state a thesis and develop it in edited American English.

In a further attempt to describe our students and their writing problems, we asked members of twenty-four randomly selected Freshman English classes to complete a questionnaire. Of the

approximately five hundred questionnaires distributed, 414 were returned. The first question on the poll (Write one paragraph that begins: “My high school English courses helped me (or *did not* help me) prepare for college because. . .”) elicited much valuable general and specific information. Generally, the students felt ill prepared and insecure. Sixty percent felt that their courses had not helped prepare them, while only thirty-seven percent felt that they had prepared them; three percent felt uncertain about whether they were prepared or not.

Later in the questionnaire, the average student reported “quite a bit” of difficulty with formulating a thesis and with mechanics, and “some” difficulty with getting a topic, with organizing, with grammar, and with writing enough. Yet these same students reported remarkably good high school grades: seventy-five percent of them earned either A or B in their last high school English courses; sixty-nine percent earned either A or B in their next-to-last high school English courses. Not the high grades, however, but the feelings of ill-preparedness and insecurity in writing were borne out by many of our statistics: the average student was able in thirty minutes to write only ninety words in five sentences; the mean length of independent clauses, often cited as a factor in syntactic maturity, was only seven words. The overwhelming majority of sentences written followed the S-V-O simple sentence pattern; only a very small percentage of the students began sentences with anything other than the subject or noun phrase. The average student essay contained slightly over two grammatical errors in barely five sentences. We balanced, of course, such analytic analysis with a holistic reading of the paragraphs and with a check against ACT English scores. The holistic rating team scored the paragraphs on a one-to-four scale, with one the lowest and four the highest score. The following results

<u>Holistic Scores</u>	<u>Number of Students receiving Score</u>
1	117
2	203
3	84
4	10

correlated well with the earlier diagnostic paragraph results: slightly over twenty-eight percent of the sample produced unsatisfactory paragraphs.

PLANNING: PHASE TWO

The 1976 report which described this student questionnaire and which provided tentative answers to our four preliminary questions ended by recommending that a pilot project be carried out the following year to test some of our assumptions and to profile the skills of incoming students who showed a need for basic writing instruction.

We spent the 1976-77 school year carrying out the pilot project (fall term), evaluating the project and analyzing student writing samples (winter and spring terms), following pilot project students through their next University terms, deciding on the basis of our evidence whether or not we should open a Writing Workshop, and, finally, preparing for that Workshop. By fall term, 1976, we were ready to do a little test tube experimentation, but we were not, to revive our original and somewhat far-fetched metaphor, ready to add a legitimate child to our University family.

Approximately one hundred students were invited to participate in the pilot project on the basis of ACT scores of ten or below on the English test and fourteen or below on the composite. The broad objects of the pilot course were as follows: (1) to enable students to write paragraphs that are built around a clear central idea to which all following sentences are linked, that adequately sustain, complicate, and develop the central idea, and that are adapted to a specific audience; (2) to enable students to increase control of basic syntactic and grammatical errors; (3) to enable students to read and comprehend university-level materials; (4) to bring students to realize that reading and writing are the major means of achieving successful university performance. All seven instructors worked on the formulation of these objectives; all volunteered for the assignment and were committed to the notion that writing skills can be taught and learned; all participated in an intensive training session.

Students in the pilot course attended class sessions four hours a week, one hour each day from Monday through Thursday. In addition, they signed up for two hours of individualized work each week in a small writing workshop staffed by the course instructors and several graduate teaching associate volunteers. Class time was devoted to class or small-group discussion workshops and to writing, thus reserving one-to-one work for bi-weekly conferences with students or for workshop time. Class work was aimed at (1) sharpening reading skills by emphasizing pre-reading, skimming and scanning, note-taking, comprehension, and vocabulary study; (2) practicing mastery of concepts

introduced by the students' common text or by the sentence-combining videotapes (produced by CUNY/SUNY, 1976) that students worked with; and (3) generating writing topics which would provide students with practice in drawing inferences, conceptualizing, summarizing, and tracing lines of analysis or argument. Students devoted the two hours of workshop time to specific writing or reading problems, either alone or with the teacher/tutor. Equipped with no hardware, the workshop provided only a place in which students could work intensively with a tutor or with a number of cross-referenced texts on reading and writing skills.

For administrative reasons, the pilot project course was offered as a five credit, S/U-graded course, the credits counting towards a student's graduation but not substituting for any other English requirement.

The average student in the pilot project scored nine on the English ACT test (though several scored as low as one or two). In an attempt to detail the student profile further, we administered an extensive questionnaire eliciting information about high school background. The results of these questionnaires indicated that twenty percent of the students took no English after the sophomore year in high school and that another thirty percent took their last English course as juniors. Furthermore, students reported that the last two English courses they took could best be described as "literature," that they did little writing (number of themes reported per course averaged slightly over two), and that, in fact, they could remember little instruction in writing sentences, paragraphs, or themes. Students reported that they had "not much" difficulty with either reading speed or comprehension (yet the reading test we administered revealed severe deficiencies). As a group, the students also felt they were well prepared to work with the dictionary, yet classwork later revealed many confused the dictionary with the *Thesaurus* and that most thought of the dictionary as simply a list of correctly spelled words. Another discrepancy emerged in student responses to questions about grammar and mechanics. Sixty percent of the students reported that they received "little or no instruction and practice in revising and correcting mechanical or grammatical errors in writing," while sixty-five percent reported "a great deal" of instruction in grammar and ninety-six percent felt that these matters influenced the grades given on assignments. While no hard and fast generalizations can hold here, in the eyes of these students one distinction seems apparent: teachers were indeed instructing them in something known as "grammar," but that subject was not related to the students' own

writing. It follows, then, that students viewed much grading of their writing as unfair. In fact, for a great many, the dissociation between grammar (the structure of our language and, in many respects, our thought) and writing was largely complete. In short, the students' views corroborated the many studies which have shown that the study of grammar alone does not improve writing. The responses to this questionnaire suggested, then, that a link needed to be established in our students' minds between well-formed sentences or paragraphs and well-formed *thoughts presented on paper*. It also suggested that the relatively high grades students received in their last two high school courses (forty-eight percent received A or B in the next to last course; forty-nine percent received A or B in the last course) might be attributed not only to general grade inflation but to the fact that much of the grading may have been based on response to literature or on such intangibles as "class participation" rather than on development and mastery of skills.

Formal measurement of student gains took the forms of four tests, administered at the beginning and again at the end of the course: (1) Form A Reading Test of the McGraw Hill Basic Skills Series,² (2) the syntactic maturity test developed by O'Donnell and Hunt (1970), (3) an in-house error-recognition/editing test, and (4) a writing sample, consisting of a paragraph written in response to a question we had tested thoroughly beforehand.

Specifically, the McGraw Hill test offered a means of measuring reading speed and flexibility, measuring comprehension, comparing pilot project student scores with those of other college freshmen, and breaking down the test items in comprehension into several sub-skill areas. Hunt and O'Donnell's syntactic maturity test, a passage of thirty-two single-clause sentences describing the manufacture of aluminum, has been widely used as a measure, particularly in studies seeking to establish the effectiveness of sentence-combining techniques. The error recognition/editing test consisted of two paragraphs containing a total of thirty errors. The majority were spelling errors involving homonyms, contractions, double consonants, word endings, and transpositions. Other categories of error included punctuation, capitalization, agree-

2. The syntactic maturity test is reproduced in *Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts* (Champaign, Illinois: NCTE, 1974), by William Fagan, Charles Cooper, and Julie Jensen.

ment (noun-verb and pronoun-antecedent), possession, adjective/adverb and comparatives, case, and verb tense. Students spent thirty minutes reading the paragraphs through completely and editing the paragraphs, sentence by sentence, correcting all errors they found by crossing out the incorrect item and writing the correction above the line. The writing sample asked students to do the following task: "On the reverse side of this paper, write one paragraph in which you present the major reason your worst teacher was ineffective." Both pre- and post-test writing samples were scored holistically by a trained team whose members were familiar neither with the students nor with the pilot project. In addition, the samples were analytically scored by another trained team, a process that included tabulating fifty-four items for each student sample. Of the four measures, the reading, syntactic maturity, and error recognition/editing tests were used primarily for diagnostic purposes while the data gathered from the writing samples, which we took from a control group as well, were used to evaluate the project.

At the end of the term, we measured student gains. On the average, participants gained twelve percentile rankings on the reading test and correctly identified sixty percent of the errors on the editing test as opposed to forty percent on the pre-test. Increases in clause length and number of embeddings were statistically significant. Most importantly, average holistic ratings went from 2.41 (six being the highest score possible) on the pre-test to 3.57 on the post-test. The analytic reading of the samples focused on fifty-four variables, from spelling and possession errors to depth of embeddings and paragraph coherence, and studied the correlations among those variables. Gathering and studying the results of this analytic reading, which are described fully elsewhere,³ took considerable time and effort, but the details we were able to add to our student profile provided ample recompense. On the post-test, the pilot project students wrote more, averaging 147 words compared to 136 words produced at the first of the term. On the post-test, only seventeen percent wrote fewer than 100 words while fifteen percent wrote more than 200 words. These figures compare significantly with the twenty-seven percent who wrote fewer than 100 words on the pre-test and the

3. See the Ohio State University report, "The Ohio State University Remedial English Pilot Project: Final Report and Follow-up Study," Andrea A. Lunsford, June, 1977. The materials for this report and its predecessor are further elaborated in A. Lunsford's dissertation, "An Historical, Descriptive, and Evaluative Study of Remedial English in American Colleges and Universities," Ohio State University, 1977.

one percent who wrote more than 200 words. Length of t-units and of subordinate clauses jumped about two words in each case, from thirteen to fifteen for t-units and from seven to nine for subordinate clauses. Furthermore, depth level of embeddings increased from 1.30 to 1.50. Topic sentences were stronger and more focused on the post-test, and errors were reduced. Spelling errors decreased from a mean of 3.8 to a mean of 2.8, run-on sentences fell from a mean of 1.0 to .58, and use of more sophisticated punctuation, such as semi-colons and colons, increased from practically zero to .25.

On the post-test, the sum of all errors made by pilot project students was 1,010 in a total of 11,172 words, or about one error in every eleven words written. This figure compared well with the pre-test paragraphs in which students made one mistake in every eight words written.

The results of the pilot project and the follow-up study of student participants encouraged us. Seventy-nine percent of the pilot project students completed the Freshman English course with a mark of C- or higher; another ten percent received D's. On the other hand, only thirty-two percent of the control group students went on to enroll in Freshman English; of the students who did enroll, only forty percent finished the course with a grade of C- or better. Our optimism was guarded, however. The pilot project and follow-up studies were based, after all, on only one hundred students. We expected our newborn Writing Workshop to serve at least two thousand students in its first year.

We began the final phase of preparation by hiring a full-time director for the Workshop, three full-time instructors, and a staff of experienced graduate teaching associates. All Workshop staff members volunteered for the teaching assignment, and all participated in a training course which focused on analyzing the strategies basic writers use, studying their cognitive development as indicated by their writing, and estimating realistic expectations for developing composition skills and controlling error. The pilot project had convinced us that student writers could make significant progress in even one quarter, but it had also convinced us that we could not expect too much improvement in such a short time.

THE WRITING WORKSHOP

Placement and Diagnosis. Our pilot project and Freshman English surveys led us to place all students with English ACT scores of fifteen or below in the Workshop. Because we had no current alternative, we

assigned students with scores of ten or below to a two-course sequence (English 100.01 and 100.02); students with scores between eleven and fifteen took 100.02 only. But we were decidedly unhappy with the use of the ACT as a placement tool. Pilot project evaluation revealed that, at the lower scores, the ACT English Test failed to correlate with student writing ability as determined by trained holistic markers. In other words, while the ACT can provide a general guideline for placement, the scores are not reliable for finer discriminations. The results of the first year Writing Workshop corroborated this finding and, as a result, students now write a one-hour essay. After reading the essays, we mark them for five large areas: coherence, basic sentence-combining (primarily coordination); sentence sense (use of subordination evident, but often resulting in flawed sentences), usage and agreement, and spelling. Students whose writing is deficient in coherence enroll in the two-course sequence; students whose writing evinces a sense of coherence but may be weak in other areas enroll in 100.02. When we find students whose writing shows a minimal grasp of all five areas, we enroll them in English 110, the Freshman English course. First results indicate that the addition of the essay question has indeed been worthwhile: as a result of the writing evaluations, 494 (or thirty-one percent) of the Workshop students were placed at a level different from the one indicated by ACT English scores alone.

In addition to the writing test, all Workshop students take the Nelson Denny Reading Test, the results of which have been consistent thus far: students in the 100.01 course read, on the average, at the ninth-grade level, those in the 100.02 course at the eleventh-grade level. When the students arrive at the Workshop, then, we know something, though certainly not as much as we would like, about what particular reading and writing skills they should begin to concentrate on.

Course Goals and Criteria for Success. During 1977-78, approximately two thousand students enrolled in one or both of the two Writing Workshop courses; during 1978-79 we expect that figure to grow to 2700. All students in the Workshop attend two classes (of fifteen students each) and one lab or conference hour weekly. Class work centers on pre-writing, writing, and rewriting activities as students share their writing assignments at various stages in the writing process. During the course of a term, students submit a number of paragraphs to be graded and then revised.

Our objectives are cumulative, both courses focusing on paragraph-

level skills. Five specific goals were set for students in 100.01: to write paragraphs (1) which respond to a particular topic, (2) which contain a topic sentence focusing on one main idea, (3) in which all sentences support the topic, (4) which fully develop the central idea using specific examples or facts, and (5) which present information in a coherent order. In 100.01, we correct mechanical and grammatical errors and teach editing skills, but we do not grade down for error. Instead, we emphasize the prior composing skills and encourage students to take risks, to experiment, to grow in their ability to write paragraphs which make sense. In short, we hold to Gilbert Ryle's view of error-making as "exercise in competency."

Course goals for 100.02 include those for 100.01, but in addition to the five paragraph-level objectives, we include three objectives which emphasize sentence and word-level skills: the student must (1) write clear, complete sentences which use subordination and co-ordination correctly, (2) use agreement and reference correctly, and (3) use words accurately and spell them correctly. The format of the 100.02 course remains the same as that of 100.01; students work on writing assignments in small class groups and in the lab. At the end of the term, students write a final in-class paragraph which is not subject to revision.

Staffed by teacher-tutors, our lab is minimally equipped with tape recorders, slide-tape cassettes, a large number of exercise-workbooks which are cross-referenced on file cards for easy student access, and individualized editing modules which we have developed in the Workshop. In both class and lab, instruction in grammar emanates from the students' own writing and responds to students' particular needs.

Funding and Staffing. Funds for the Workshop, which come entirely from within the University, are limited; we have no luxuries, only essentials. The director, three instructors in three-year, non-tenurable positions, and a very small clerical staff support a group of eighteen teaching assistants and lecturers, each of whom instructs three groups of fifteen students each week. However, a group of outside reviewers, who participated in a departmental self-study this year, recommended strongly that the Workshop positions be awarded to tenure-track assistant professors and that the teaching load be reduced.

First-Year Results. Although our first year research and evaluation is not yet complete,⁴ preliminary findings tell us that we have some good news and some bad news. On the positive side, Workshop students wrote longer paragraphs (137 words on the pre-test; 166 on the post-test) with fewer errors per paragraph at the end of the courses than they wrote at

the beginning (error-word ratio went from 1:14 to 1:16½). Average holistic scores for paragraphs, again based on a six-point scale with six the highest mark, rose from 2.4 on the pre-test to 3.0 on the post-test. Reading scores, on the average, climbed one grade level, from tenth to eleventh grade. Nevertheless, the improvement of Workshop students was not as marked as was that of the pilot project students. Several factors undoubtedly play a part in this finding. First, through an oversight, Workshop students had only thirty minutes in which to write the pre- and post-test paragraphs, compared to the forty-eight minutes which pilot project students were given to complete the same assignment. In addition, because the pilot project included students who scored 10 or below, our research had failed to tell us very much about the large number of students who scored between eleven and fourteen on the ACT English Test. As a result, we spent much of the Workshop's first year studying and learning about this group. And Workshop students attended class fewer times per week than did students in the pilot project.

Our worst news was that our Workshop students have not become the independent editors of their own writing that we had hoped for; error count is still too high. This finding has led us to modify Workshop procedures this year so that students do all graded writing *in class*. In this way, we are trying to sharpen our students' focus on error and give them much more practice on in-class editing.

Statistical figures seldom evoke for us the students present behind them. Perhaps we can concretize some of our figures by offering the paragraphs written by one typical Workshop student on the pre-test and post-test. We feel that these two paragraphs illustrate very well the statement one of our students made toward the end of his Workshop courses: "I guess you *can* teach an old dog new tricks, but it's a lot harder."

Pre-test paragraph.

When a teacher, who is new and faighten by her new job and her student. This poses a problem when she fail to keep control over her student within the classroom. Then to keep her class under control her needs to call another or a principal to control her class. Which causes

4. The first-year program and its evaluation will be thoroughly described and analyzed in a third in-house report currently being prepared by Sara Garnes. For further information about this report or either of the earlier two reports, contact the authors of this article.

student dislike and hated for the teacher. I feel this kind of teachers should not be teaching student on a high school level.

Post-test paragraph.

My worst teacher was ineffective because he could not relate to the class and he was always in his own little world. For example, he would pace the floor, look down at the floor while he was talking. He would very rarely look up at the class during his lecture. When somebody did get his attention to ask him a question he would go into a long explanation and then he would get lost in what he was talking about. Another example, is when you went to talk to him about your tests grades. He would at like he was not there and you would feel like you were talking to the wall. He could never explain why you got that grade on the test. This is why I feel he is my worst teacher.

Although the post-test paragraph still contains six proofreading errors (*at* for *act*, three comma omissions, *tests* for *test*, and a superfluous comma after *example*), the paragraph shows considerable improvement over the one this student wrote at the beginning of 100.01. Certainly we have no magic dust to sprinkle on our students, but we are convinced that, given time and effort, they can indeed become competent writers.

SOME FINAL GENERALIZATIONS

Now that our long period of gestation is over, and the young member of our University family has celebrated its first birthday, what have we learned? First, that basic writing programs, again like families, must be willing to change, to adapt to the special and shifting demands of their members. Concomitantly, we have learned that planning, no matter how careful, prudent, or intense, cannot assure prescience. We find, therefore, that we must expect about a two-year period of adjustment as the new program establishes itself, responds to growing numbers of students, and learns from its own successes and failures.

We have also learned that evaluation of a large program, while exceedingly important, is also exceedingly complex. Isolating significant variables and gathering data are difficult tasks in themselves. But those data must then be brought to life, related directly to our students, and then interpreted to widely diverse groups, including administrators, parents, newscasters, and politicians. Competent and thorough evaluation of a basic writing program requires both time and money, and these

must be included in the budget from the very outset of the program.

We have found, furthermore, that a term-by-term special appropriations budget such as the one we have is much too restrictive. We would recommend that developers of basic writing programs bargain for a regular academic budget from the start.

In spite of budget restrictions, we still hold to one concept which evolved from our preliminary research and which our first year has reinforced: successful basic writing programs will be ones that (1) are able to integrate written instruction within other University departments and (2) move beyond the campus to work with and learn from teachers in the secondary and elementary schools. Thus far, we have begun a cooperative program with the Department of Mathematics, and we are offering workshops in which University and secondary teachers share insights gained from their teaching of basic writers. But we hope to do much more to strengthen our ties with teachers both within and without the University.

Most importantly, we have learned that a basic writing program which hopes to improve student writing must hold to an experimental paradigm. When a program begins to do things just because "that's the way we've done them before," it takes its first step toward becoming ossified, shifting its attention from its students and their own unique attributes, and abandoning self scrutiny. As Mina Shaughnessy has so eloquently taught us, we can help students improve their writing skills if we will study those students and learn from them and with them how we may best teach them. By its very nature, such a mutual learning program demands an experimental paradigm.

Thus far, our staid and cautious approach to conceiving a new member of our University family seems to have been a fruitful one. The baby, demanding, of course, but healthy and growing, inches its way toward maturity. Clearly not a fleeting flirtation, the romance between the University and writing instruction may indeed be here to stay. And if the romance endures, can our students stay far behind?

Karl K. Taylor

DOORS ENGLISH—
THE COGNITIVE BASIS OF RHETORICAL MODELS

Teachers of freshman English—particularly in the community college—assume a great deal about their students. For example, many college instructors assume—and correctly—that teaching the rhetorical types is important because students will face them in various forms and subjects. These types include cause/effect, comparison/contrast, process, narration, definition, and summary. If a history teacher, for instance, asks students to compare and contrast World War I to World War II on an essay or in a paper, the students are likely to do better if they have written similar assignments previously in a composition course. Instructors also assume, it appears, that college students are ready to deal with rhetorical types at the level they are usually presented; that is, they assume when assigning a comparison/contrast paper that a college student is able to grasp that form of organization when he reads it and is able to manipulate information mentally, using comparison as a tool for arriving at logical decisions.

After more than ten years of teaching English and the rhetorical types at Illinois Central College, I began to doubt whether college students were successfully using these simpler basic skills of comparison upon which the rhetorical model is built. Initially, I believed they simply could not organize, or their ideals were too synthetic, mundane, or immature. I viewed student failure then as a writing problem, not as a problem of faulty or lagging cognitive development. But, reading the work of Piaget,


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particularly his theories about cognitive development, persuaded me that my students might be suffering from some kind of developmental lag which affected their writing performance. As Piaget and others have pointed out, the child, when moving from infancy to maturity, seems to progress through four stages—from the sensory-motor and pre-operational to the concrete and formal level of operations. Oversimplifying, one could probably say a person at the third stage—the concrete—learns a concept best while actually manipulating concrete objects. For example, to teach the concept of comparison/contrast to the students at the concrete level, the teacher would be most effective by encouraging students to compare two objects which could be handled or examined closely. An approach of this type is common during the first years of elementary school. However, once students have reached the formal level of operations, they can grasp this concept of comparison in an abstract manner. The instruction, for instance, might be strictly oral, a lecture, without any reference to concrete objects. This practice is common, beginning during the junior high school years or earlier.

Despite Piaget's hypothesis that 17- or 18-year-olds should be at the formal level, I concluded my students might not have fully arrived at that point. If that were true, my instruction—geared to the formal—was falling on minds not yet able to understand what I was trying to do. Evidence for this tentative conclusion came from papers displaying a total lack of organization or papers of a superficial nature, for example comparing a Venus pencil to a Bic pen. Perhaps even more convincing was that students could not really use the rhetorical skills as tools of logical thought once they had completed the course. They could not apply what they had learned, a fact noted by my colleagues in other disciplines. In short, a writing problem might be a manifestation of a much more basic problem in cognitive development.

For further clarification, I have created the following chart to illustrate the possible levels of difficulty involved in comparison/contrast tasks. As one can see, a given individual progresses through five stages of development from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the complex, and from the oral to the written. "Input" is defined as the method by which the two objects being compared are presented to the individual. "Output" is the manner by which the individual expresses his comparison, either orally or in writing. "Precision" is the expected quality of the comparison, moving from gross distinctions about concrete details to fine distinctions about abstract details.

COMPARISON/CONTRAST HIERARCHY

<i>Input</i>	<i>Output</i>	<i>Precision</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stage One</i></p> <p>Large, concrete object Small, concrete object</p>	Oral	Gross distinctions about concrete detail.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stage Two</i></p> <p>Photograph of large object Photograph of small object</p>	Oral	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stage Three</i></p> <p>Drawing of large object Drawing of small object</p>	Oral	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stage Four</i></p> <p>Written description of large object Written description of small object</p>	Oral or Written	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stage Five</i></p> <p>Written description of an abstract concept, like the purpose or function of two similar things.</p>	Written	

At *stage one*, an individual could be asked to compare two similar objects like a Volkswagen and a Mercedes. The resulting description might be relatively gross if the person involved is a child, but finer distinctions would be expected from an adult. The gathering of details would be relatively easy because the examiner could directly observe the two cars both inside and out. The organization of the output is likely to be unsophisticated because the presentation is oral.

At *stage two*, the examiner would have greater difficulty gathering data because the number of details would be reduced. Because it would be impossible to view the two concrete objects directly, the examiner would have to rely on what the camera detected. Again, the organization would be simple because of the oral output.

Stage three is even more difficult because now the examiner must rely on how the artist viewed the two cars. Thus, during the first three stages, the examiner's input is continually reduced because fewer and fewer concrete details are available for making the comparison. The output remains at the same level of difficulty because it is given orally.

Stage four becomes more difficult because the input requires reading, which is more complex than vision, and writing, which is more complex than speech. Now the examiner must secure his information from reading and convey the differences in writing.

At *stage five* the input and output remain as difficult as in the previous stage, but at this time the examiner must view the cars in a totally new light. Instead of dealing with concrete or perceptual qualities like size, shape, color, and the like, the examiner may be called upon, for instance, to compare the motivation for buying each of the cars. Logically, it would appear that students must be able to handle comparison at the four lower levels before successfully meeting the demands of stage five.

The point is that most English teachers probably assume college-age students, because of their age and previous experience, can easily deal with comparison in stage five. On the other hand, my experience led me to hypothesize that some college students were not operating at the formal level of operations characteristic of stage five. My evidence came from student papers reflecting the qualities common to stages three and four. Thus, my feeling was that many of my students were at a transitional stage between the concrete and the formal, and for that reason, my instruction, to be successful, had to start where the students were.

With this hypothesis in mind, I began searching the literature in three fields—English, reading, and psychology—to determine if any research had been done on this idea. I was unable to find anything directly related to what concerned me. However the available research and customary practice in teaching writing implied support for Piaget's notions. By accident, I discovered a growing body of research conducted over the last seven years by science educators, showing many young adults have not reached the formal level of operations. Instead, they were operating at

the concrete or at a transitional point somewhere between the concrete and formal levels. Representative of these studies are Campbell (1977), Dunlap and Fazio (1976), Griffiths (1976), and McKinnon and Renner (1971). Although these studies were encouraging, they focused on various Piagetian experiments such as conservation of number or volume; that is, they measured whether students could grasp scientific phenomena. None directly investigated the rhetorical modes or types which seemed as fundamental as some of Piaget's tasks.

To test my notions, I developed a transfer-level English class for the DOORS program at Illinois Central College at East Peoria, Illinois. The acronym stands for *Development of Operational Reasoning Skills*, and the program includes a core of courses: introductory English, mathematics, history, economics, physics, and sociology. This interdisciplinary experiment, taught by six different instructors, is sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (HEW). Although the teachers involved in the project are attempting to integrate the skills and content taught in the various courses, no team teaching is done. As such, the program is not really intended for remedial students per se, but rather for average or slightly below average students who do *not* lack critical mathematics or reading skills.

At the outset of the semester, the six instructors agreed in principle with the notion that our students might be suffering from some type of lag in cognitive development. For that reason, the DOORS teachers decided to center all of the six different courses on the skills undergirding the rhetorical types. In so doing, the instructors made the content subservient to an understanding of the rhetorical modes; we wanted our students to develop skills which they, in turn, would apply to the content. For instance, cause/effect was introduced and explained in the English class, but the physics teacher stressed the mode when students were dealing with problems in the laboratory. And in their respective disciplines, the other teachers focused on cause/effect in history, sociology, economics, and mathematics. The chart following shows the various reasoning skills stressed during the first eight weeks.

Week	English, History, Sociology	Math, Economics, Physics
1	Observation (Identification of variables)	Observation (Identification of variables)
2	Description (Describing variables)	Description (Describing variables)
3	Comparing or Relating (comparison and contrast)	Comparing or Relating (graphing)
4	Comparing or Relating (Comparison and contrast)	Inferring (Graphing)
5	Classification	Separation and Control of variables
6	Classification	Separation and Control of variables
7-8	Summary	Separation and Control of variables

In the English class, the students wrote eight papers, over a sixteen week semester, in the following order: description, comparison/contrast, classification, summary, process, personal experience, definition, and cause/effect. The first four papers were written during the first eight weeks, two weeks on each paper. As can be seen from the chart, the skills undergirding the rhetorical modes were introduced at relatively low levels of difficulty not only in the English class but also in the other classes. For example, when students were studying comparison/contrast in English, history, and sociology, they were learning about a special kind of comparing, graphing, in mathematics, economics, and physics. If there are five levels of comparison/contrast, as I suggested earlier, it seemed to me that the students were receiving plenty of practice with the lower levels before or at the same time as they were preparing to write a comparison/contrast paper.

The inclusion of the rhetorical modes in the typical freshman English class is not unusual; what is unusual is *how* the modes were presented in DOORS. Contrary to other courses, we assumed students could benefit

from working on these rhetorical modes at the concrete level before dealing with the formal level. In a typical course, however, the English teacher begins the instruction, on the classification paper for instance, by explaining how to write it. This approach assumes the student already knows what classification is and can actually classify. In DOORS English, I began the instruction by asking the students to perform a number of *concrete* classification exercises to insure that they understood the concept behind the rhetorical type. Writing a paper using one of these modes seems to represent the most difficult task and was reserved until the student understood the concept.

To illustrate these concrete, preliminary exercises, I am including below descriptions of three of the assignments. For comparison/contrast, the students were asked to complete 70 picture comparisons from Upton and Samson's *Creative Analysis* (1961). A typical problem contained five pictures and a place for an answer, like the example below:

	A	B	C	
Piper Cub Airplane	Jet Fighter Plane	Semi Truck and Trailer	Jet Passen- ger Plane	Sailboat
<div style="text-align: center;"> <u>Airplanes</u> B </div>				

In this instance, the student would be asked two questions. First, which figure—A, B, or C—is most like the first two pictures? The answer is B. Second, what is the relationship between the three figures—the two given and B? The answer is “airplanes” because all three pictures are of airplanes. Although this is an obviously simple example, many were more complex. Generally, very few students had difficulty selecting the proper figure, but a relatively large number could not accurately state the relationship between the items.

Following these pictorial comparisons, I selected a group of picture analogies, again from Upton and Samson's *Creative Analysis* (1961). A typical analogy might look like the one below:

$$\frac{\text{Arrow}}{\text{Bow}} = \frac{\text{Baseball}}{?}$$

A
B
C
Baseball Bat
Ball Glove
Tennis Shoe

These exercises seemed more difficult than the previous problems because more than two comparisons were required, but they were easier than verbal analogies because vocabulary was not a primary element in making the proper choice. Yet, these exercises were concrete, and most students had no difficulty with them.

At the next stage in comparison/contrast instruction, I gradually began introducing the verbal analogy which I believe represents one of the most difficult kinds of comparison, but it is slightly easier than writing a theme using this rhetorical mode. I broke the analogy instruction into five small components and tried to exclude any problems which might create vocabulary difficulties. With the first component, I gave the students two words and asked them to choose the proper relationship:

Tall:Short

- a. opposites b. cause to effect c. part to whole

Next, in ascending order of difficulty, I supplied three items for the analogy, and the students had to choose from five possible answers to complete it.

Game:chess::sport: _____ (a)

- A. swimming b. insurance c. stadium d. horse e. checkers

With the third component I presented a complete analogy, and they were to identify the relationship:

Tall:short::fat:skinny

- a. conversion b. class naming c. opposites d. function

For the fourth step, I included faulty analogies which students were to correct or rewrite entirely.

From: Gas is to pump as water is to cold

To: Gas is to pump as water is to well.

The last set of exercises required the students to write an analogy, using a relationship supplied by me:

_____ : _____ :: _____ : _____

Relationship: functional

One student's response to the last kind of problem looked like the following:

Screw:screwdriver::bolt:wrench

The last step for the students was to write a comparison/contrast paper, after a short discussion of how to do so.

In order to assess whether all this work on analogies had an effect on the students, I administered pre- and post-analogy tests which I had developed myself. The same instrument was given to a control group consisting of non-DOORS students taking similar courses taught by the DOORS instructors. This evidence indicated a significant difference in the ability of the two groups to solve analogies on the pre-test; the control was initially better than the experimental group. However, there was no difference between the two groups on the post-test. Thus, we can probably say the treatment for the experimental group improved their skills for solving analogies.¹ A perceptive critic might say improvement in the ability to solve analogies is no guarantee the skill will transfer to

better comparison/contrast papers. I fully agree with this criticism, but I have not yet devised a means of measuring the transfer.

A second assignment to be singled out for special attention was summary, the task of reading something and summarizing the main idea in writing. Although summary is not generally considered a way of thinking, like comparison or classification, it requires many thinking skills. I became interested in this assignment because it is popular in so many different kinds of classes and because I believe it is often neglected or slighted in the traditional college English class. Unfortunately, I could find no research studies concentrating on the student's ability to read expository material and to summarize the main idea in writing. Yet, many students complain about their difficulty understanding what they read and recording their ideas on paper. Many teachers, moreover, complain (Sherwood, 1977) about their students' inability to read with comprehension, whatever that general kind of criticism means. Teachers, however, may not fully grasp how complex this assignment is for some students.

Once again, working with the same concept as I had with comparison, I made certain assumptions about this assignment: students must know how to summarize orally before we can teach them to write the summary paper; many of them cannot summarize or write a summary; and most of them would benefit from concrete practice exercises. As a consequence of my thinking, I developed a series of assignments. Since I suspect the length of the material to be summarized affects the difficulty, I presented these students with single sentences, continued with single paragraphs, progressed to multiple paragraphs, and concluded with short essays of no more than one thousand words. Hence, after the students read these expository passages, they summarized them in writing in as few a words as possible. Since their responses were expected to be relatively short—certainly not more than three or four sentences—they received practice in summarizing, not in writing summary papers, which would involve introductions, examples, and conclusions. Thus, I was trying to begin summary instruction at the concrete level.

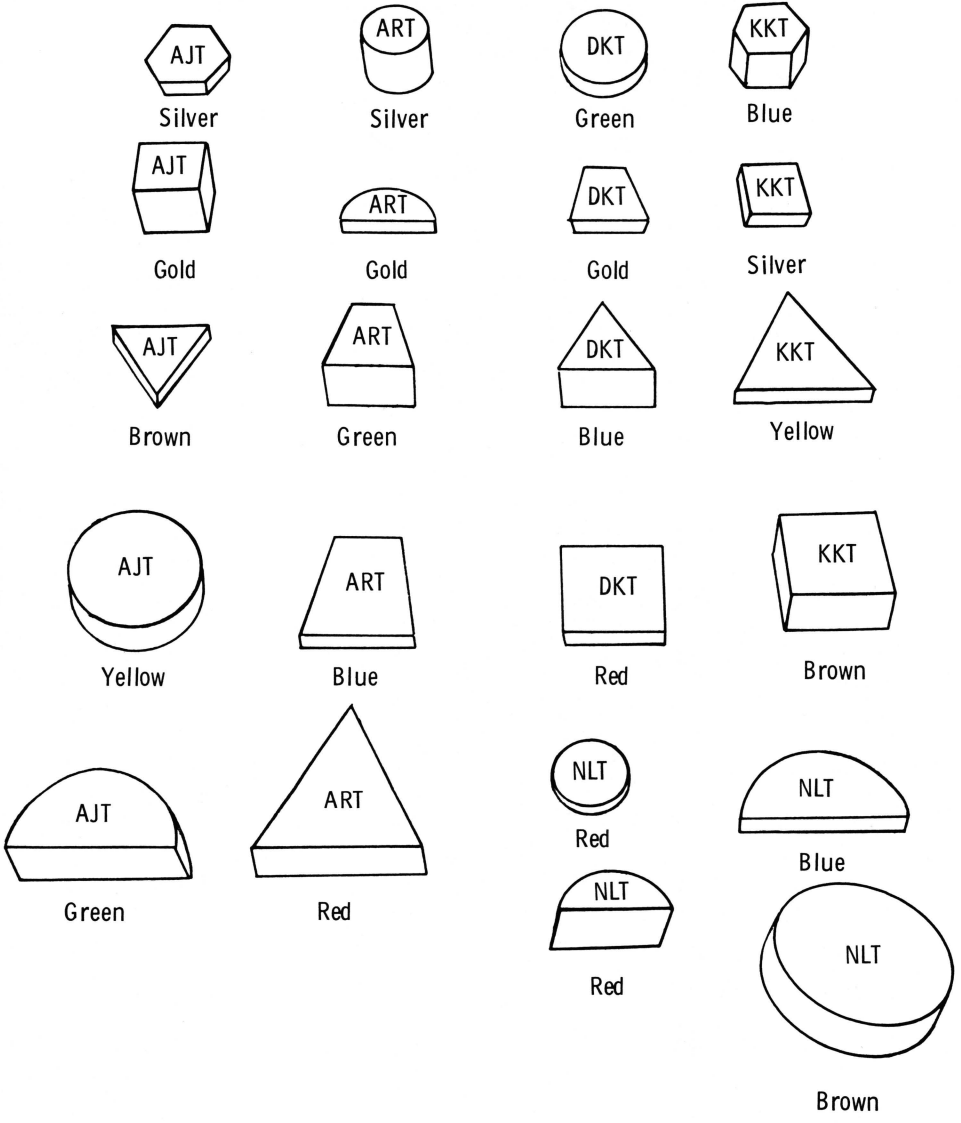
1. Both groups did very poorly on the pre-test: the experimental group (N=16) scored a mean of 2.4 and the control group (N=34) scored a mean of 2.9. The difference between the means on the pre-test was not statistically significant ($t = 1.60, p < .12$) at .05. On the post-test, the experimental group received a mean of 3.13, the control a mean of 3.4. The difference between the mean scores was not significant ($t = .89, p < .38$).

What were the results of the instruction? My suspicions were confirmed: most of the students initially could not summarize accurately and briefly. Several subsequent trials with the materials revealed a kind of hierarchy of student responses to the task of summarizing. Much like youngsters writing a short report in elementary school using an encyclopedia, these students originally wanted to copy whole articles, refusing or failing to put the passage in their own words. This deficiency may have stemmed from a fear of putting down what might be incorrect—it's always more precise to copy word-for-word—or from an inability to form a Gestalt. Next, as they gained more experience, they used more of their own words and fewer from the original. Only gradually were they able to rid themselves of the tendency to quote directly from the passages given to them to summarize. Accordingly, as they used less quotation and more of their own words, they were able to compress their summaries in fewer words. In short, I found, after three weeks of concentrated practice, my students could improve their summaries, but to date I have not devised a way of measuring the transfer of this skill to the writing of summary papers.

Classification was a third rhetorical type chosen to receive special emphasis. Like the summary and comparison/contrast assignments described earlier, the skill of classification is probably assumed to be intact by many teachers at the college level. They assume college freshmen are able to take raw data of some sort and to put it into logical categories. Although perhaps some instruction is provided in this skill, most of the class time is spent discussing how to write the classification paper. Since I assumed many of my students were not performing at the formal level of operations, I began with the following set of blocks which I devised (Fig. 1).

Without any instruction in classification, the students were each given a set of blocks and an answer sheet. They were asked to spread the blocks out on a table and to classify them in as many ways as they could. On the answer sheet, they were to record the major and minor categories under which the blocks fell. Once they had recorded a classification scheme, the students were to replace the blocks in the pile and to reclassify them, using still another principle of organization. All of this work was done outside of class, and the students were allowed as much time as they wanted to complete their work. Although most students were able to detect about half of the most obvious categories, they failed to note the most formal or abstract schemes.

Figure 1.



Following the blocks, I presented the students with a variety of visual materials which they were to classify. For instance, I assembled a group of geometric figures which printers use to fill space at the bottom of columns of print—triangles, circles, snowflakes, crosses, and the like. Again, the students were to sort and re-sort these figures. Next, I presented them with 46 small drawings of numerous subjects: an owl on a branch, an unlit candle, two black cats, a coke and hamburger, a basket of flowers, a trumpet, a tennis racket, etc. I selected these drawings because they were exact and because they presented a new problem. With the previous assignments, all the objects fit under one major category like blocks; now the students were confronted with an array of objects and of possible major categories. The last set of visual materials consisted of 22 pen and ink drawings from *The New Yorker*: two sailboats drydocked for winter, a closeup of a bakery, a produce market in the country, a wharf scene, and the like. With these drawings, the students were confronted with rather formal or abstract ways of classifying and with single pictures which could fall under a multitude of major and minor categories. Later classification exercises were more verbal in nature: Marboro book advertisements, classified housing ads, want ads for used household goods, and a series of letters to the editors of *Time* about a single subject. The point of all these assignments was to move from the concrete to the abstract and from the visual to the verbal. In so doing, I assumed the movement was from the simple to the complex, providing the students with plenty of practice in classification prior to instruction in writing the classification paper.

The findings from the DOORS project have been reported elsewhere (Taylor, 1978), but a few conclusions are worthy of mention here. As I had hypothesized, most of my average college students were not initially operating at the formal level of operations. In the case of classification, for instance, the mean score for the groupings of blocks was a score of six out of a possible 13. When I questioned several students privately, I found they had rather confused notions about this mode. Most realized that the material had to be placed in groups, but they did not understand that the objects in the groups must be related. In other words, they grouped data without regard for the relationship between items in the categories. Similar findings were evident with the other modes. The practice at the concrete level seems to have brought more mature papers. Although I have had difficulty creating a statistical method showing transfer of this skill to the themes, the results to date have been encouraging.

In summary, DOORS English is an experiment with average or below average students. Although the content of the course is similar to others across the country, the method is unusual. The instruction begins at the concrete level, where most students are operating, and ends at the formal level when they use the rhetorical skill in writing. Lest I be misunderstood, I have *not* found that students are completely ignorant of the rhetorical modes or ways of thinking. However, I have found evidence that their knowledge is often confused and incomplete, resulting in unorganized or superficial compositions. If students are to succeed, it appears teachers can profitably spend some time insuring that their students genuinely understand the concepts and cognitive skills undergirding the rhetorical modes. We must start where students are.

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THE WRITING SEGMENT OF AN INTENSIVE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The ultimate goal of a writing program for academically oriented ESL students is to teach the written form of English required for success in United States colleges and universities. Foreign students must learn the same skills required of native speakers, such as the writing of reports, research papers, and essay exams. Indeed, many students with a solid background in English and high English proficiency (TOEFL¹ 500 or more) on campuses where there is no intensive English program learn these skills in freshman composition classes along with native English speakers. Students who know little or no English when they arrive, however, have special needs which are met by special programming. In intensive English programs, students study English for a minimum of 20 hours per week, with each class day divided among the language skill areas, typically listening and speaking, reading, writing, structure and possibly language laboratory.² Depending on entering proficiency and learning speed a student may require three months to a year of English study before he is ready to begin academic work.

Our program is divided into three distinct levels to accommodate the entering English proficiencies of our students. Level One students are virtually monolingual in their native language (TOEFL range 200-375) although they may have studied a year or two of English in their home countries. Level Two students (TOEFL 375-425) are at the intermediate

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1. The Test of English as a Foreign Language is available from the Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey.

2. From Guidelines on Intensive English Programs, established by the Consortium of Intensive English Programs, a sub-group of the Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) Section of the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA).

level, and Level Three students (TOEFL 425-500) are advanced and should be prepared to do academic work upon successful completion of the level. At each level there is one hour per day devoted to learning writing skills.

The students' overall program of classes per week at each level is as follows:

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Pronunciation and Speaking Skills	4	4	2
Oral Grammar	4	4	2
Reading & Vocabulary	4	4	4
Writing	4	4	4
Language Lab	4	4	4

Each class has a maximum of 15 students. Entering students are placed by means of a standardized proficiency test, biographical information regarding previous study of English and, in borderline cases, an oral interview and a writing sample. There are students from many language backgrounds in each class, although Arabic, Spanish, Persian Farsi, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese are the most common.

Students progress through the levels on the basis of achievement. If they do the work at Level One with passing success, they may proceed to Level Two. On occasion a student will work tremendously hard and make such astounding progress that he will skip from Level One to Level Three.

As a rule the students are placed in a single level for a given fifteen-week term. Sometimes a student with greatly differing abilities will be assigned to classes at two levels. For example, Arabic-speaking students are often much better in oral skills than in reading and writing. Such students might take Level One reading and writing classes and Level Two oral skills classes.

RATIONALES³

Our approach to teaching writing depends on certain basic beliefs about language and language learning.

3. Elaboration and justification can be found in Paulston and Bruder, 1976, Chapter 6.

1. Written language for rhetorical purposes is different from spoken language and must be learned as a separate skill.
2. Rhetorical organization varies from language to language and is best taught from a contrastive rhetoric standpoint.
3. The role of writing in the language learning process changes as students gain in proficiency. At beginning levels, writing serves as a reinforcement of the oral grammar patterns being learned. It provides a visual mode to complement the aural one, a fact which accommodates various learning styles. At more advanced levels, writing becomes an end in itself.
4. People learn to write by writing and by receiving corrections on what they have written.
5. People need both controlled and free composition from the beginning level, although controlled composition is phased out as the students' writing skill increases.
6. Due to varied language backgrounds of the students and the variation in learning pace, certain aspects of learning to write are highly conducive to individualization.

LEVEL ONE

Goals. Writing at the beginning level serves in large part to reinforce the oral grammar patterns through a different modality. As the student proficiency increases, more attention is devoted to writing as a separate skill.

The students at this stage concentrate on correctness of form at the sentence level, the mechanics of punctuation, filling out forms, elementary organizational strategies, and, if they are not familiar with the Roman alphabet, handwriting skills. They also engage in free writing practice.

Procedures. The major emphasis at this level is on teaching the fundamental principles of English sentence formation. Unlike native speakers of English who come to the writing class with long experience in the language, the foreign student must learn word order patterns for affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences, rules of subject-verb agreement, the forms of regular and irregular verbs, and the meanings expressed by the various verb tenses. We need to teach pronouns and

rules of pronominal reference, and the form, meaning, and word order for adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases.

Students progress toward mastery of these basic principles of sentence formation through focusing in each lesson on a particular teaching point, a form or pattern. Among those specifically included in the curriculum are the simple present and simple past tenses; the present and past continuous tenses; the modal verbs; the subject, object, and reflexive pronouns, and expressions of quantity; the definite and indefinite articles; and adjectives and adverbs. A typical lesson consists of the presentation and explanation of the teaching point followed by the students' working individually on written exercises focusing on the pattern under consideration. The explanation is always a brief presentation of the rules for formation and use of the structure along with appropriate examples. However, the nature of the related written exercises changes as the academic term progresses.

At the beginning of the semester students write out the responses to the grammar drills from their oral grammar text, Bruder's *MMC: Developing Communicative Competence in English as a Second Language*, a sentence level activity which largely involves making specified structural changes in model sentences, such as transforming a statement into a question. We find that this type of exercise reinforces understanding of the patterns learned in the grammar class and helps students to gain control of the most basic structures without having to be concerned with the additional problem of formulating and organizing their ideas in the new language.

Depending on individual rates of progress, but generally about six weeks into the course, students stop working on drill exercises and begin working on sentence formation within the paragraph. For this phase of the course we use controlled composition exercises. Paulston (1972) and Paulston and Bruder (1976) have enumerated in some detail the benefits of controlled composition. In summary, its use allows for the systematic grading and sequencing of teaching points and provides for the student to focus on one pattern at a time, maximizing his opportunity to write correct paragraphs and thereby increase motivation. Controlled composition exercises lend themselves well to an individualized format, and, furthermore, they are easily corrected.

There are many types of controlled composition exercises (see Paulston and Bruder, 1976), but most consist of a written model which is to be rewritten by converting or manipulating particular structures in some specific way, such as transforming a paragraph written in the

simple present tense to the simple past. The degree of control is determined by the model and the type of language manipulation required. Ideally, the student should proceed from controlled exercises to semi-controlled writing in which a model provides the content for a composition but in which there is little structural control. The final step is free writing, in which the student uses the patterns of the teaching point in a free composition of his own creation.

For this aspect of our Level One course we use Baskoff's *American English Guided Composition* which, while it does not embody all the principles of controlled composition, does allow for guided writing focused on specific well sequenced teaching points. Students read a model paragraph containing examples of the pattern under consideration, study the appropriate grammar rules, do sentence level exercises requiring application of the rules, and finally write a paragraph based on and similar to the model but drawing on their own experience for the content. In a lesson on frequency adverbs, for example, the students read a model paragraph entitled "A Typical Day in My Life," which demonstrates the use of the adverbs. They then proceed to do sentence level exercises involving the adverbs, and the final step is writing a composition like the model, in which the student describes a typical day in his life using the teaching point pattern.

While it is felt that controlled composition is the most effective means of achieving mastery of the basic sentence level patterns, the students do need frequent opportunities to write free compositions, and they do so once a week in our Level One curriculum. However, the teachers suggest topics which are within the range of the students' expressive ability in English. One technique we have found to be effective here is to find an interesting picture to have the students describe, since description tends to elicit the patterns the students have mastered.

Effective correction is crucial for learning the writing skill and correction techniques are essentially the same for controlled and free compositions. Using a set list of correction symbols, teachers indicate student errors focusing on the teaching point and previously learned patterns. Careless errors or errors on past learning points are merely underlined and the student is required to identify the mistakes. It is sometimes difficult to convince teachers not to correct everything, but we feel to do so would overwhelm the student; it is more efficient to concentrate on teaching point problems. Students must correct their mistakes, and in cases of extreme difficulty, rewrite papers before they get full credit for the assignment. It is the teacher's responsibility to work

on problem areas with individual students during the class hours.

Compositions are also corrected for punctuation points covered in the language lab where the students use Jaramillo's *Conventions in the Mechanics of Writing: A Language Laboratory Manual for Foreign Students*. Following along in their books, students hear rules given on tape; they are then required to punctuate sentences in the manual correctly by applying the appropriate rules. The writing teachers keep informed about what lessons have been covered and provide additional explanation in class where necessary. At Level One the punctuation teaching points covered include capitalization and use of the period, comma, apostrophe, and quotation marks.

Our students who come from language backgrounds such as Arabic or Farsi which use a writing system other than the Roman alphabet require explicit, systematic instruction in handwriting. They are shown how to use Bright and Piggott's *Handwriting - A Workbook* and are given assignments according to their needs. These students cannot be expected to learn the writing system by mere exposure to it; they must know what features distinguish one letter from another, capital letters from small letters, handwriting from typing. We have found use of a workbook in which students can practice copying letters and letter combinations an efficient way of helping them to write legibly in English.

An additional writing skill which students living in this country need but seldom learn from conventional writing texts is the ability to fill out forms properly. We are currently experimenting with materials designed by Romaine Goetz (1977) to teach students in a systematic way how to correctly provide information on forms such as college applications and immigration documents.

All of the activities just described are implemented within an individualized format to allow each student to advance at an appropriate pace. Slower students have the opportunity to spend extra time on problem areas, and faster students can progress quickly through easier material. At the beginning of each class the teacher hands back corrected work and distributes assignment sheets detailing what each student is to do in class and for homework. The instructor then explains the relevant teaching points, usually with small groups of students who are working on the same teaching point. Most of the teachers' time, however, is spent circulating around the room working with individual students on previous and new assignments, a procedure which maximizes the opportunity for individual attention to particular problems.

For an individualized format such as this to work to the students' benefit, procedures must run smoothly. Teachers need to keep careful records detailing each students' progress, and the daily lesson plan must include what points are to be covered with which students. Depending on the teacher's preference, some classes have individual student folders containing corrected work and the new assignment, which are distributed at the beginning of the class. Other teachers keep track of student progress simply by means of a checklist.

LEVEL TWO

Goals. Most of our students who successfully complete Level One proceed to the Level Two course which also contains individuals entering the program at this level. The goals of this course remain largely the same as at Level One but concentrate on more advanced grammar patterns commensurate with the increased proficiency in English. In addition, the students learn some of the basic organizational and rhetorical devices of English; there is greater emphasis on coherent development and organization of ideas within the paragraph and short composition. We teach the students more advanced punctuation rules and provide an opportunity for those entering at this level to improve their handwriting and learn how to fill out forms.

Procedures. Students at this level understand more English and can benefit from more teacher explanation of grammar patterns and rhetorical devices. The teaching points at this level are more difficult and complex, and therefore it is more efficient for all students to work on the same lesson, receiving rule explanations from the teacher and then applying these rules in class and homework writing assignments. As in Level One, however, most of the class period is spent in writing while the teacher circulates throughout the room answering students' questions and going over problems from previous assignments.

We believe that students at this phase of learning must still progress from greater to lesser control in their writing activity, but we have been unable to find a controlled composition text suitable to our students' needs. Therefore, we have found it necessary to experiment with lessons prepared by Furey (1978) which are inter-sequenced to teach both grammar patterns and rhetorical devices or organizational principles.

The grammar patterns taught at this level include articles, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, the past perfect tense, passives, gerunds, *if*-clauses, and comparatives and superlatives. A typical lesson focuses on a specific pattern contextualized in a model paragraph which the students read before coming to class (See Appendix). After having the students identify examples of the teaching point pattern in the model, the teacher provides a grammar explanation, encouraging the students to analyze the structure and provide generalizations on the pattern's form and function. Following the presentation by the teacher, which generally takes 5 to 10 minutes, the students start their assignments, first working on controlled sentence level exercises which require manipulation of the structure under consideration and then proceeding to a less controlled activity, usually writing a paragraph or two similar to the model in content.

Rhetorical devices and organizational patterns are taught much the same way as the grammar points. In this course, the students learn and practice some of the basic principles of American English rhetoric—the use of topic sentences, supporting ideas, transitional words, and parallelism to achieve clarity and cohesion within the paragraph. They learn to do outlines and to write good introductions and conclusions for short compositions. Each rhetorical teaching point is introduced by a model or example of its use, followed by an explanation to be presented by the teacher. Structured, controlled exercises in the use of the device are followed by a freer writing exercise requiring the student to apply what he has learned in previous explanation and practice.

Free compositions are frequently assigned at this level, sometimes to be completed within the class hour so that students will become used to writing within time limits as they will later have to do in their academic work. The length of the compositions is gradually increased from paragraphs of 100-150 words to three or four paragraph compositions of 120-300 words. The students generally find it helpful to have topics suggested; we try to think of areas that are more thought provoking and sophisticated than those at the first level, such as “The Role of the Father in My Society,” or “Some Solutions to the World Hunger Problem.”

The techniques for correction are the same as for Level One; a great deal of emphasis is placed on students' correcting their mistakes and, when necessary, re-doing their papers to be handed in again. A good deal of class time is devoted to working with individuals on particular problem areas. The thrust here is a problem solving one; the teacher goes over a previous assignment having the student identify his errors and correct them.

Punctuation work continues in the language laboratory where students go beyond basic punctuation to consider ellipses, underlining, quotation marks, and hyphens. Students entering at this level who need work on handwriting are assigned exercises from the handwriting workbook.

LEVEL THREE

Goals. It is at this level that the writing skill assumes independence in our writing program. This is the terminal ESL course for most of our students, and it must prepare them to compete with native speakers in writing essays and research papers and in taking notes. They also need to learn to write the grammar patterns required almost exclusively in prose, such as the agentless passive and certain types of clauses, like non-restrictive relative clauses or absolutes. We also introduce the use of a reference grammar (Crowell, 1964), which we hope students will continue to use beyond the English classes.

Procedures. The class time itself is no longer individualized. A great amount of information must be imparted and the most efficient way to do this is to use a lecture-recitation format, reminiscent of a composition class for native speakers of English. The students complete their assignments on an individual basis, however, and each essay or research paper must be acceptable in the writer's academic discipline.

A great deal of time is spent on the writing of the research paper, a skill of great importance in American universities but culturally alien to many of our students. Following Markman and Waddell's *Ten Steps to Writing a Research Paper*, the project is broken down into manageable units beginning with a tour of the library that concentrates on the card catalogues and other reference tools. At each step, the students show the teacher some sign of progress—bibliography cards, a revised thesis, an outline and so forth—to forestall the last-minute dashing off of a paper. About two-thirds of the way through the term, students hand in the rough draft for teacher correction, and the final paper is handed in at the end of the term. The papers are graded on organization and development of ideas; grammar, spelling, and punctuation; footnotes and bibliography; and overall form, including neatness, title page, margins and the like.

The rhetorical devices and development of ideas are presented from Seale's *Writing Efficiently* and go beyond those devices taught in Level Two. For example, students work on developing and supporting

arguments; they write chronological and descriptive paragraphs; they write summaries. The teacher assigns a reading, discusses it in class and then assigns a composition which illustrates the pattern. The compositions are corrected by noting page references to Crowell's *Index to Modern English*. The students then correct their own errors. Practice with advanced grammar patterns such as the past perfect tense, conditional modals, and object complements, come from Frank's *Modern English: Workbook II*.

Another area on which we spend a good bit of time is plagiarism. American scholars regard plagiarism as indication of such moral turpitude that we tend to forget that it is after all a culturally learned concept and totally strange to people who regard the use of others' ideas, acknowledged or not, as the highest form of compliment. In training the students, we first try to explain the notion by examples. We emphasize the need for complete and formally proper acknowledgement. Then we try to explain how plagiarism is regarded in American university circles. Finally, we check carefully any suspect work; proven plagiarized work automatically receives a failing grade.

At all three levels, the work is carefully graded. Grading practices vary according to the major emphasis of the levels, but the students receive a term grade for the writing course which is averaged with grades in the other skill areas to derive one composite grade for each term. The average grade for the Institute classes is "C" which is consistent with general undergraduate grading practices. In addition to the ordinary functions of motivation and feedback, letter grades introduce the system used at most American institutions but not used in the rest of the world. By the time the students enter academic programs, they have some feeling for the difference between "A" quality work and "C" quality work.

We do not wish to imply that students who successfully complete the program are excellent writers of English—that takes years of constant practice and hard work; but they have been provided the tools with which to compete with native speakers if they wish to do so.

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APPENDIX

ELI 3 - WRITING

Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous (1)

MODEL PARAGRAPH

Americans *have become* very concerned about the energy crisis in recent years, and many different universities, research institutes, and private companies are now trying to find ways to solve the problem of the fuel shortage. The citizens of Western Pennsylvania *have been* even more aware of the fuel shortage problem since the winter of 1977. Extremely cold weather caused a scarcity of natural gas, and people are afraid that the same thing might happen again in the future. Individuals at the University of Pittsburgh *have been doing* different kinds of research to help solve the energy crisis. For example, petroleum engineers in the School of Engineering *have recently been studying* more efficient ways to getting oil from the ground, and Professor Paul Reznick of the Petroleum Engineering Department *has just received* a grant from Gulf Oil to study the flow of oil and gas in petroleum rocks. Professors in the chemistry department *have also been working* on the energy problem. For example, some faculty members are investigating the use of solar energy. Eventually, energy from the sun will probably meet many of man's needs, but right now this form of energy is useful for only a few purposes. Scientists are looking for more efficient ways to capture the sun's rays and convert their energy into a useable form. The study of nuclear energy is another area of research which *has become* more important in recent years, and there is also a renewed interest in the use of coal as an energy source.¹

Grammar Rules

PRESENT PERFECT

Form

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{has} \\ \text{have} \end{array} \right\} + \text{past participle}$

We have traveled a lot this year.

She has had many problems this term.

1. Some of the information for this passage is taken from *University Times*, Vol. 10, #2, September 22, 1977.

For many verbs the past participle form is the same as the simple past tense form. For other verbs, the past participle is *irregular*. Refer to your list of Irregular Simple Past and Past Participle Forms.

NEGATIVE: I *have not* paid my telephone bill yet.
She *has not* seen her family for one year.

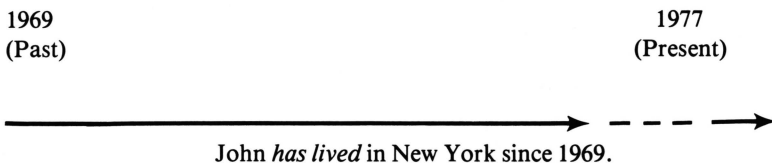
INTERROGATIVE: *Have* you *eaten* at C.J. Barney's this week?
Has the teacher *made* an appointment with you?

What are the main verbs in the sentences above? the auxiliary verbs?

Use

We use the present perfect tense in English in *three* ways:

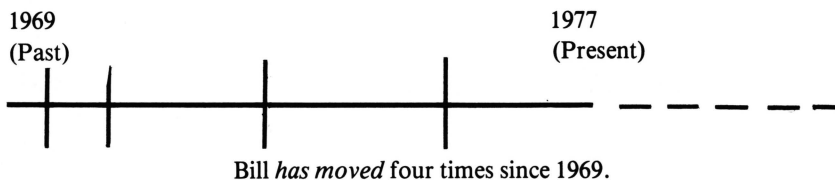
- 1) It indicates an action or state which began in the past and which continues *up to* and *into* the present. The action or state *may* continue into the future.



We often use time expressions with *for* or *since* with this use of the present perfect tense.

- I *have been* a student for three years.
- Joan *has always given* a lot of money to her sister.
- So far, you *haven't failed* any courses.
- I *have not seen* your sister since you introduced me to her.
- There *have been* engineering courses at this university since 1943.

- 2) It indicates an action or state which was *repeated* in the past and which *may be* repeated in the future.



I *have eaten* only once today.

The band *has played* that song twice this evening.

You *have had* a lot of interesting experiences since you arrived in the U.S.

With this type of present perfect we may use *since* and time expressions such as *today, this week, this year*, etc. which indicate that the time is not completed or finished.

I *have seen* him once this week. (This week is not finished; I may see him again before the week is over.)

3) It indicates an action which occurred at an *unspecified* or *indefinite* time in the past.

I *have studied* French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

He *has* already *visited* the Museum of Fine Arts.

They *have* just *received* their grades.

Have you seen your advisor yet?

Compare these sentences with the following *simple past tense* sentences. The time is *definite* or *specified*.

I *studied* French, Spanish, and Portuguese when I was in college.

He *visited* the Museum of Fine Arts last July.

They *received* their grades yesterday.

Did you see your advisor before you registered?

With this type of present perfect we use time expressions such as *already, yet* (with negative and interrogative forms), *just, lately, recently*, etc. (See Lesson 14 of *MMC* for the use of *already* and *yet*). Except for *yet* which usually occurs at the end of the sentence, these time expressions often occur between the auxiliary verb and the main verb. In fact, *just* always occurs in this position.

PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS

John has been studying chemistry for three years.

{ has } + been + -ing form of verb.
{ have }

We use the present perfect continuous to emphasize the continuity or duration of the action or state. It indicates that an action or state which began in the past is still in progress at the present.

The baby *has been crying* for three hours.

I *have been trying* to find my check book for three days.

What are the negative and interrogative forms of the present perfect continuous?

Exercise #1—In the blank to the right of each verb, write the correct *past participle* form.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. be _____ | 11. hurt _____ | 21. forget _____ |
| 2. hope _____ | 12. leave _____ | 22. play _____ |
| 3. see _____ | 13. make _____ | 23. tell _____ |
| 4. have _____ | 14. put _____ | 24. wish _____ |
| 5. buy _____ | 15. read _____ | 25. eat _____ |
| 6. want _____ | 16. say _____ | |
| 7. choose _____ | 17. speak _____ | |
| 8. come _____ | 18. take _____ | |
| 9. drink _____ | 19. think _____ | |
| 10. get _____ | 20. study _____ | |

Exercise #2—Re-write each of the following sentences changing the verb forms to the *present perfect*. Substitute the time expressions at the left for those which are in italics.

this year Ex. We flew from Singapore to Bangkok twice *last year*.

We have flown from Singapore to Bangkok twice this year.

this month 1. John visited Toronto twice *last month*.

since he arrived in the U.S. 2. Ahmed applied to three universities *while he was in the English course*.

since the end of the war 3. Maria lived in South America *before the revolution*.

recently 4. *Yesterday* I went to the dentist because of a severe toothache.

since 1975 5. Several valuable paintings disappeared from the art institute *last year*.

for three years 6. Sandra dated George *during her sophomore year at the university.*

yet 7. Did you take your vitamin pill *at breakfast?*

since the companies improved working conditions 8. There was not a coal miners' strike *last year.*

Several times 9. *Last May* I borrowed money from the bank in order to buy a car.

for a year 10. Roger did not see his family *last year.*

since the beginning of winter 11. *When the weather was bad,* the busses were very crowded.

already 12. I applied for a social security number *last week.*

Exercise #3—Re-write each of the following sentences changing the verb forms to the *present perfect continuous*. Substitute the time expressions at the left for those which are underlined.

for a month Ex. Tim was planning his trip to the Middle East *last term.*

Tim has been planning his trip to the Middle East for a month.

since dinner 1. The couple was arguing *when I left.*

since he left the party 2. Jim was not feeling well *after the party.*

for a couple of hours 3. We were playing cards on the beach *when it started to rain.*

for twenty minutes 4. I was shopping for groceries *when I saw my teacher at the market.*

since the English course started 5. Were you going to the lab *when the elevator broke down?*

Exercise #4—Answer each of the following questions using either the *present perfect* or the *present perfect continuous*.

Ex. How long have you been living here?
I have been living here since 1974.

Ex. How long have you known Maria?
I have known her for two months?

1. What cities have you visited since your arrival in the U.S.?
2. How long have you been studying English?
3. What have you been doing on the week-ends?
4. How often have you been homesick since you came here?
5. How many hours a night have you been spending on your homework?

Exercise #5—Read each of the following sentences carefully. Then rewrite the sentences using either the *simple past* or *present perfect*, whichever is correct.

EXAMPLES

- | | |
|-------|--|
| take | 1. I... <i>took</i> ...two trips to New York last year. |
| take | 2. I... <i>have taken</i> ...two trips to New York this year. |
| study | 1. I.....at Pitt since 1971. |
| come | 2. John.....over to my house last night to watch television. |
| have | 3. Most American universities.....serious financial problems since the 1960's. |
| go | 4. Several of us.....to the Three Rivers Art Festival last week-end. |
| eat | 5. We.....at Ali Baba's twice this month. |
| be | 6. Fifth Avenue in Oakland.....a one-way street for several years. |

- be 7. Last January and February extremely cold months.
- have 8. Since I began to study English, I many problems
with the verbs.
- fly 9. We to Philadelphia twice this year.
- cook 10. Since I bought a new cookbook, I many interesting
foreign meals.
- buy 11. I a new Toyota last night.
- buy 12. Jim recently a Datsun.
- visit 13. My family Spain during their trip to Europe last
summer.
- visit 14. I already Spain several times.

ELI 3 — WRITING

Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous (2)

Ask your teacher about any problems you had on your homework exercises. He or she will discuss these problems with the class. Then do exercise #6.

Exercise #6—Write a paragraph like the model which describes a problem of your country or the world and explain some things that people have done to solve this problem. Use some *present perfect* and *Present perfect continuous* forms and underline them. Your paragraph should be at least 125 words.

David Bartholomae

TEACHING BASIC WRITING: AN ALTERNATIVE TO BASIC SKILLS

At the University of Pittsburgh, we teach Basic Writing to around 1,200 students each year. The instruction is offered through two different courses—Basic Writing (3 hours, 3 credits) and Basic Reading and Writing (6 hours, 6 credits). We also have a Writing Workshop, and basic writers frequently attend, but their attendance is voluntary, and the workshop is not specifically for writers with basic problems.

The courses are not conventional remedial courses: they carry full graduation credit and there is little in the activity the courses prescribe to distinguish them from any general or advanced composition course. In fact, because of the nature of the assignments, the courses would be appropriate for students at any level. This is certainly not to say that there is no difference between a basic writer and any other student writer. There are significant points of difference. But it is a way of saying that writing should be offered as writing—not as sentence practice or paragraph practice—if the goal of a program is to produce writers. The assignments, about 20 in a 15 week term, typically ask students to consider and, from various perspectives, reconsider a single issue, like “Identity and Change” or “Work and Play.”¹ In the most general terms, the sequence of assignments presents writing as a process of systematic inquiry, where the movement from week to week defines stages of understanding as, week by week, students gather new information, attempt new perspectives, re-formulate, re-see, and, in general, develop a command of a subject.

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1. For an example of such a sequence of assignments, and for discussion of sequence as a concept, see: William E. Coles, Jr., *Teaching Composing* (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, 1974) and William E. Coles, Jr., *The Plural I* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978). My debt to Bill Coles will be evident everywhere in this paper.

The instruction in writing, which is basically achieved through discussion of mimeographed copies of student papers, directs students in a systematic investigation of how they as individuals write, and of what they and their fellow students have written. The assumption behind such a pedagogy is that growth in writing ability is individual; that is, it will follow its own developmental logic, one that derives from a syllabus "built into" the learner, and such growth takes place not through the acquisition of general rules but through the writer's learning to see his language in relation to the languages around him, and through such perception, to test and experiment with that language. Such a process begins not with the study of Writing in the abstract, but only when a student develops a way of seeing his own writing, and a way of seeing that his writing has meaning beyond its paraphrasable context, that it is evidence of a language and a style.

We set out, then, to construct a pedagogy to develop that analytical reflex that would enable students to see their writing as not only "what they said," but as real and symbolic action: real, as deliberate, strategic, and systematic behavior, not random or outside the realm of choice and decision; and symbolic, as dramatically represented through such terms as "voice" or "writer," "audience," "approach," and "world view."² For the basic writer, this might mean the recognition that the errors in his writing fall into patterns, that those patterns have meaning in the context of his own individual struggle with composing, and that they are not, therefore, evidence of confusion or a general lack of competence.³ This perspective might mean the recognition that one's writing defines a stance in relation to an imagined audience or an imagined subject and that any general improvement would include improved control over that kind of imagining. Or this perspective might bring about the recognition that writing is deliberate and strategic, not random, not something that just happens to a writer. When students are able to see that they have been making decisions and exercising options, other decisions and other options become possible.

The nominal subject of the course, then, is defined by an issue like "Work and Play," but the real subject is writing, as writing is defined by

2. I am making a distinction here very similar to that in Richard Ohmann, "In Lieu of a New Rhetoric," *College English*, 26 (October, 1964), 17-22.

3. I am, of course, summarizing one of the key findings of Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). This paper draws heavily on Shaughnessy's work.

students in their own terms through a systematic inquiry into their behavior as writers. Behind this pedagogy is the assumption that students must be actively writing and simultaneously engaged in a study of their own writing as evidence of a language and a style, as evidence of real and symbolic action.

Most basic writing programs I observe, and most basic writing texts, are developed as though this were not possible. They begin with the assumption that the writing of basic writers is a “simpler” version of a universal writing process, or that it is evidence of unformed or partially developed language behavior, that the performance of basic writers is random, incoherent, as if basic writers were not deliberately composing utterances but responding, as the dominant metaphor would have it, mechanically and doing so with unreliable machinery. The end product of this reasoning is that basic writers need, finally, to learn basic or constituent skills, skills that somehow come prior to writing itself. Before students can be let loose to write, the argument goes, they need a semester to “work on” sentences or paragraphs, as if writing a sentence in a workbook or paragraph in isolation were somehow equivalent to producing those units in the midst of some extended act of writing, or as if the difficulties of writing sentences or paragraphs are concepts rather than intrinsic to the writer and his struggle to juggle the demands of a language, a rhetoric, and a task. These basic skills are defined in terms of sequences—“words, sentences, paragraphs, essays” or “description, narration, exposition, persuasion”—that, in turn, stand for a pedagogy.

Such a pedagogy meets the immediate needs of teachers who are frustrated by an almost complete inability to understand what could be happening in the heads of students whose writing seems to be so radically different from their own, or from the writing they’ve learned to read. And it is the convenience of this pedagogy, which frees all parties, teachers and students, from ever having to talk about writing, that leads teachers to hang on to it in the face of evidence that it produces limited returns. The skills curriculum is not founded on any investigation of the language that students produce, nor any systematic investigation into how writing skills are acquired. If there is a syllabus common to such skills courses, it derives its logic and its sequence from the traditional study of the sentence and the paragraph, units the learner is seen as incompetent to produce, rather than from any attempt to imagine a sequence of instruction drawing on the syllabus built into the learner, corresponding to his particular competence and the stage of his development in the acquisition of the formal, written dialect.

The distinction that needs to be made, I think, is the distinction between competence and fluency.⁴ Mina Shaughnessy's brilliant study of the writing of basic writers in *Errors and Expectations* shows the fallacy behind the thinking that equates signs with causes, that necessarily assumes a student misspells because he can't spell, leaves endings off verbs because he doesn't know how tenses are formed, or writes a sentence fragment because he doesn't understand the concept of a sentence. Her work defines both the theory and the method of analysis that can enable us to see student error as other than an accident of composing or a failure to learn. In fact, she argues that the predictable patterns of error are, themselves, evidence of students' basic competence, since they show evidence that these writers are generating rules and forming hypotheses in order to make language predictable and manageable.⁵ Errors, then, can often be seen as evidence of competence, since they are evidence of deliberate, coherent action. Error can best be understood as marking a stage of growth or as evidence of a lack of fluency with the immensely complicated process of writing, where fluency can be as much a matter of manipulating a pen as it can be of manipulating constituents of syntax.

A pedagogy built upon the concept of fluency allows distinctions analogous to those Frank Smith makes in his analysis of the reading process. A fluent reader, according to Smith, is one who can immediately process large chunks of information, as compared to the reader for whom the process is mediated by mental operations that are inefficient, inappropriate or a stage in some necessary developmental sequence.⁶ Basic skills, then, are basic to the individual's ability to process information and can be developed only through practice. The natural process of development can be assisted by pedagogies that complement an individual developmental sequence, and by those that remove barriers, false assumptions, like the assumption that readers read each word, or read sounds, or understand everything at every moment.

BASIC WRITING

Our program begins, then, with the recognition that students, with the exception of a few who are learning disabled or who have literally never

4. For a discussion of this distinction between fluency and competence see David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," *Linguistics, Stylistics and the Teaching of Composition*, Donald McQuade, ed. (Akron, Ohio: Akron University Press, scheduled for publication in November, 1978).

been taught to form words, possess the skills that are truly basic to writing. They have the ability to transcribe speech into writing, and the writing they produce is evidence of the ability to act deliberately in the production of units of discourse to some degree beyond the single sentence. We separate out, as secondary, what can justifiably be called mechanical skills, skills that can be taught as opposed to those that can only be developed.⁷ D'Angelo has defined these skills as handwriting, capitalization, punctuation and spelling.⁸ Since a knowledge about these is of a different order than linguistic or rhetorical knowledge, they are not the immediate subject of a course in composition. Since, however, errors of capitalization, punctuation, or spelling are not necessarily due to a simple lack of information about capitalization, punctuation, or spelling but must be seen in the context of an individual's confrontation with the process of composing through written language, this is not to say that a concern for those errors is secondary.

A responsible pedagogy, I've been arguing, begins by making the soundest possible speculation about the syllabus built into the learner, rather than imposing upon a learner a sequence serving the convenience of teachers or administrators. We have decided that the key to such a sequence lies in what we might call a characteristic failure of rhetorical imagining, a failure, on the part of basic writers, to imagine themselves as writers writing. Or, to phrase it another way, the key to an effective pedagogy is a sequence of instruction that allows students to experience the possibilities for contextualizing a given writing situation in their own terms, terms that would allow them to initiate and participate in the process by which they and their subject are transformed. This, I take it, is the goal of Friere's pedagogy for non-literate Brazilians, a "problem-posing" education that enables the individual to turn his experience into subject matter and himself into the one who names and, thereby, possesses that subject.⁹

The goal of instruction in basic writing at the University of Pittsburgh is to enable students to locate ways of perceiving and describing

5. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*, 104-5, 117-18.

6. Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971).

7. John Warnock, "New Rhetoric and the Grammar of Pedagogy," *Freshman English News*, 5(Fall, 1976), 12.

8. Frank J. D'Angelo, "The Search for Intelligible Structure in the Teaching of Composition," *College Composition and Communication*, 27 (May, 1976), 142-147.

9. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968). See chapter two.

themselves as writers. We've chosen to do this by involving them, through class discussion of student papers, in the regular, systematic analysis of what they have written and how they went about writing it. The only text for the course, then, is the students' own writing and if there is a theory of instruction, it is embodied in the kinds of conversations we have in class about that writing. The classes are designed to enable students to develop, for themselves and in their own terms, a vocabulary that will allow them to name and manipulate their own idiosyncratic behavior as writers. The conversations in class, as the class evolves over the term, approach writing in four ways. The approaches, of course, overlap and at times seem identical rather than different, but for convenience's sake let me describe four perspectives we want students to develop on their performance as writers.

The first of these "approaches" asks students to consider writing as an experience by asking them to analyze and describe their experience with our assignments over the course of the semester. If they do nothing else, discussions about how an assignment was done, what it was like and how it felt can enable students to see the ways in which writing is a human activity, one that can be defined in personal terms. For students who see writing as a mystery, or as a privilege of caste, it is liberating to hear others, including instructors, talk about how sloppy the process is, or about ways others have dealt with the anxiety and chaos that so often accompany writing. It's liberating to hear of the habits and rituals of other writers. It's liberating to find out that ideas often start out as intuitions, as a sense of a connection it would be nice to make, and that the ideas only become reasoned and reasonable after repeated acts of writing. It's helpful to discover that other writers get stuck or have trouble starting at all, just as it is helpful to hear about ways others have found of getting past such blocks. And finally, it is always liberating for students to hear that successful and experienced writers produce good sentences and paragraphs only after writing and throwing away a number of lousy sentences and paragraphs. This is not how writing is described in our textbooks, and students, even if they know how to talk about "topic sentences," "development," or "transitions," don't know how to talk about writing in ways that make sense given their own felt experience with the process.

Writing is a solitary activity and writers are limited by the assumptions they carry with them to the act of writing. They are limited, that is, by the limits of their ability to imagine what writing is and how writers behave. The basic writers we see characteristically begin with the assumption that

good writers sit down, decide what they want to say and then write straight through from an Introduction to a Conclusion without making any mistakes along the way. So if it is liberating to hear about the struggles and rituals of other writers, the power of such liberation extends beyond the comfort that one is not alone, since the process of identifying a style of composing, and seeing that style in relation to other styles, is the necessary prelude to any testing and experimenting with the process of writing.

In addition, the activity of collecting information from the reports of other students, generalizing from that information, and defining a position in relation to that general statement recapitulates the basic intellectual activity of the course. It is exactly what students are doing as they write papers on "Work and Play."

One way of approaching student writing, then, is to have students, once they have finished an assignment, gather specific information on what was easy and what was hard, what was frustrating and what was satisfying, where they got stuck, what they did to get going again, and so on.

Another way of approaching writing is to have students analyze their performance as a task or a problem-solving procedure.¹⁰ Since writing is, by its nature, a strategic activity, any discussion of strategy in general ought to begin with students' analyses and descriptions of the strategies underlying and perhaps inhibiting their own performance as writers. The point of such discussion is not to give students rules and procedures to follow, recipes for putting a paper together, but to put them in a position to see their own writing as deliberate, strategic activity and to put them in a position to find labels for that phenomenon.

There are any number of ways of initiating such an inquiry. We ask students, once they've finished a series of papers, to go back and find what they see to be their best piece of writing in order to draw some conclusions about where those ideas or where that writing came from. We also ask students to conduct a general survey of how people write. Each student is asked to describe the preparation of a specific assignment as evidence of distinct "stages" in the writing process, and each class

10. For a "task analysis" approach to writing see: Susan Miller, *Writing: Process and Product* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1976). For writing as problem-solving see: Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," *College English*, 39 (December, 1977), 449-462.

develops its own model of the composing process by pulling together the information from the individual accounts and defining categories, or general definitions of stages. This model, and the labels students invent to define it, serves as a point of reference throughout the term. Students may return at a later date to consider their activity in a single stage, like revision or pre-writing, through the same process of analysis. Again, students are gathering information, generalizing and locating themselves in relation to general truths.

Clearly one of the lessons that emerges from this inquiry is that there is no one way of describing writing, since individual composing styles will define points that can't be brought together by a generalization. So if it is true that a writer's performance is limited by his ability to imagine how writers behave, then the process of objectifying a composing style and measuring it against the styles of other writers, and against models for the composing process offered by the instructor, is one way of improving that performance.

There are two occasions when the instructors step in and impose terms on the general inquiry. Early on, if students' own responses don't lead us to it, we make a distinction between generating and editing, since we are anxious to involve students with two different "modes" of writing—one self centered or subject centered and the other audience centered. Writing in the first mode, which can be tentative, exploratory and risk-free, a way of talking to oneself, doesn't ever emerge without extensive prompting.

We also direct students, after the first few weeks, to both write and re-write. And re-writing is defined as separate from editing, which is presented as clean-up work. Re-writing is defined as the opportunity for the discovery of new information and new connections, where the first draft serves as a kind of heuristic. It is also the occasion for consolidating and reshaping the information in the first draft, where the first draft is a rough draft. Every assignment, in fact, falls into a sequence in which papers are re-written at least once. The re-writing is done with very specific directions and the resulting papers are reproduced and considered in the next class discussion. The emphasis on rewriting reflects our own bias about how successful writers write, and about the importance of enabling non-fluent writers to separate the various demands, like generating and editing, that writing makes upon them in order to postpone concentrating on some while focusing on others. In conjunction with this, there is an assignment that asks students to consider successive drafts, both their own and others', in order to draw conclusions about what they see happening, and to come up with advice they could offer to other writers.

The third focus for conversation is the students' writing as evidence of intellectual activity, as a way of knowing. Each focus could be represented by a basic question. The questions for the first two might be something like, "What was writing like?" and "How did you do it?" The question representing this third area of focus would demand a much higher degree of reflexivity, since it asks students now to see their writing as symbolic action. The appropriate question would be something like, "Who do you become by writing that?" or "What sort of person notices such things and talks about them in just such a way?" Or perhaps the question would be, "Who do I have to become to take this seriously, to see reading this as the occasion for learning and discovery?" The aim of such questions is to enable students to imagine a rhetorical context, another way of seeing "meaning" in their language beyond its paraphrasable content. If writing is a way of knowing, each act of knowing can be represented by dramatizing the relation between writer, subject, and audience. A student's uncertainty about how one establishes authority in a paper, or about what constitutes intelligent observation, can be represented for that student in dramatic terms when, for example, the discussion in class leads to a description of the writer as a parent pounding on the dinner table and giving Lessons on Life to a wayward child.

It's been noted in several contexts that when basic writers move from report to generalization they characteristically turn to formulaic expressions, Lessons on Life.¹¹ In response to students' difficulty in producing meaningful generalizations, much attention is being paid to research in cognitive psychology, presumably in hopes of finding a key to the mechanism that triggers generalization. A response more in keeping with our own training, however, is to acknowledge the motive in such an utterance and to redirect the writer by asking him to re-imagine both his audience and his reason for writing. While it is initially funny for students to realize the role they have cast for me and for themselves in such writing, discovering an alternative is a problem they will wrestle with all semester, since it requires more than just getting things "right" the next time. It means finding a new way of talking that is, at the same time, a new way of representing themselves and the world.

This approach to the relation between the student's language and the conventions of academic discourse is more likely to engage a student's

11. See, for example: Thomas J. Farrell, "Literacy, the Basics, and all that Jazz," *College English*, 38 (January, 1977) 446-447, and Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*, 230-233.

own sense of his knowledge, of the ways in which he can become an intelligent observer and recorder, than any set of lessons on the structure of academic prose, since it is based in a student's own writing and represents that writing as a dramatic act of verbal placement rather than as the mechanical yoking of something called "ideas," on the one hand, and "form," on the other.

There are also more specific ways to account for the difficulty these students have participating in the world of ideas. Surely part of the problem can be seen as external to a student's innate competence as a concept maker, since one universal of basic writing is the students' conviction that while other people's lives provide the stuff out of which concepts are made, this is certainly not true of their own. Basic writers' relations to the world of verbal culture are often defined in such a way as to lead them to conclude that no relation is possible. To use a metaphor offered by one student of mine, ideas may be "stolen" from books or from teachers. It is foolish, then, to assume that they can be "offered" or "shared."

The responsibility of a pedagogy is to enable students to imagine the kind of relation between themselves and their world that allows them to turn their experience into "subject matter" and to define a relationship with that subject that makes creative thinking possible. This is not just a matter of a lesson in class or a pep talk, since whatever we say in class will be understood only in relation to our actual assignments, where we are, in effect, establishing the conditions of such a relationship. Let me describe one response to this problem by describing a sequence of assignments taken from our Basic Reading and Writing course.

The students write a series of papers that describe a change that has occurred in their lives in the last two or three years in order to draw conclusions about how change occurs in adolescence. These papers lead up to a longer autobiographical essay that asks them to draw some conclusions about change in general. At the same time, they are reading autobiographical accounts of children and young adults caught up in change—Margaret Mead in *Blackberry Winter*, Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* and Huck in *Huckleberry Finn*.¹² The autobiographical essays are reproduced, bound together, and offered to the class as the next text in the series

12. Our sequence of reading and writing assignments grew out of our reading of James Moffett, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), especially chapter four.

of assigned readings. Students read the autobiographies in order to report, in writing, on what they see to be the significant patterns—common themes and experiences or contradictory themes and experiences—and to provide names or labels for those patterns. They do this in order to go on to speculate, in general, on the ways adolescents change and the kinds of changes that occur. The next set of assignments directs them to the first half of Gail Sheehy's *Passages*, where they see her involved in an identical process of inquiry, report, labeling and speculation. As writers, they are asked to go back to reconsider the autobiographies, this time using Sheehy's labels as well as their own. The last two books for the course are Edgar Friedenberg's *The Vanishing Adolescent* and Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*.

The point of the sequence is to allow students to reconsider the positions they have achieved in their own study of adolescence by defining new positions in relation to the more formal representations of psychologists and anthropologists. But their own attempts to categorize and label provides the source of their understanding of Sheehy, Friedenberg, and Mead. The labels and categories of academic culture are not given prior to the students' attempts to make sense out of the subject in their own terms. As a consequence, the students are allowed not only an aggressive stance in relation to these ideas, but also, and this is the most important point, in relation to the intellectual activity which these ideas represent. Theories, in other words, are seen as things real people make in order to try and make sense out of the world, not as gifts from heaven. These assignments also provide occasion for students to consider the methods they used for going back to a book and rereading in preparation for writing, and to confront, through a consideration of their own papers, the question of presenting information through quotation and paraphrase.

Earlier in this paper I argued that basic writers are limited by the ways they imagine writers behave. It is also true, however, that they are limited by their assumptions about how thinkers behave. When we chart in class, whether through a student paper or some problem-solving exercise, the *ad hoc* heuristics that underlie a student's thinking, the most common heuristic is the heuristic of simplification. Basic writers, because they equate thought with order, profundity with maxims, often look for the means of reducing a subject to its simplest or most obvious terms. Ambiguity, contradiction, uncertainty—those qualities that are most attractive to academics—are simply “wrong” in the minds of students whose primary goal is to produce controlled and safe essays.

As long as writing teachers' instruction represents thinking in terms of structures, and not process, the attitude that courts uncertainty or contradiction is unlikely to develop. Consider, for example, what one formula for paragraphing invites students to do. We tell them to begin by stating an idea, which means they will put down the first thing to come to mind, which, for any of us, is most likely to be a commonplace. Then we tell them to "restrict" that idea and to "support" it with some examples, so that writing "about" the idea precludes any chance to test or probe that idea. If a piece of contradictory evidence worms its way in, or if a student changes his mind half way through, he has, as my students never fail to remind each other, made a "mistake," since the contradictory movement—the one place where something might be said to happen—destroys the "unity" and "coherence" of the paragraph. This image of coherence invites students to be stupid, and that invitation is confirmed whenever we praise an empty paragraph for being well developed.

At the University of Pittsburgh, courses are designed, then, to enable students to see their own writing from various perspectives: as an experience, as a task, as a way of knowing. The last perspective we need to provide for basic writers is a way of analyzing their writing for error. Since our courses are designed to invite students to take risks, to try to do and say things they cannot immediately do and say, we are inviting them to make mistakes. To cover their papers with red circles would be a betrayal of this trust, and yet it would be irresponsible to act as though error didn't matter. Since each set of assignments makes a distinction between first drafts, revisions, and editing, we have the opportunity to provide a context where focus on error can be meaningful, where it can be seen in relation to other ways of talking about writing.

We make no reference to error or to editing at all for the first third of the term. We've found that certain errors will disappear and others will become less frequent as students simply practice writing and become more limber and fluent. In addition, we want to establish firmly a way of talking about and valuing writing as something other than the production of correct sentences, since a recognition of what writing can be and the ways one can be serious about writing can provide the incentive to spend the time it takes to make writing correct.

We introduce editing by tacking a third stage onto writing and re-writing, a time set aside to re-read final drafts in order to circle mistakes and then, if possible, make corrections. We have found, from this, that one of the most difficult tasks we face is teaching students to

spot errors in their writing, and this difficulty is not necessarily due to an inability to distinguish between “correct” and “incorrect” forms.¹³ Consider, for example, the student who wrote the following:

This insight explain why adulthood mean that much as it dose to me because I think it alway influence me to change and my outlook on certain thing like my point-of-view I have one day and it might change the next week on the same issue. My exprience took place in my high school and the reason was out side of the school but I will show you the connection. Let me tell you about the situation first of all what happen was that I got suspense from school. For thing that I fell was out of my control sometime but it taught me alot about responsdability of a growing man. The school suspense me for being late ten time. I had accumate ten dementic and had to bring my mother to school to talk to a conselor.

When this student read the passage out loud, he automatically filled in the missing words, corrected *every* incorrect verb by speaking the correct form, and added S’s where they were missing from plurals. He also gave the correct phonetic representation of “accumate” (accumulate) and “dementic” (demerit). And he made all these corrections as a reader even though in most cases he could not, at least without a great deal of coaching, see the discrepancy between the words he read and the actual black and white marks on the page. The issue with this student is not so much one of competence but of fluency with the extremely complicated process of transcription.

The fact, then, that students overlook errors while editing is not necessarily due to carelessness or a lack of understanding of standard forms. In most cases, we’ve found the difficulty lies in the trouble basic writers have objectifying their language and seeing it as marks on a page rather than perceiving it as the sound of a voice or a train of ideas. Students “see” correct forms when they proofread because they read in terms of their own grammatical competence. Clearly there is a class of error, most often errors of syntax, that some students cannot see because they lack some basic conceptual understanding, such as an understanding of the boundaries of the sentence. But there is another class of error that

13. For a full discussion of this problem and some suggested exercises see: Patricia Laurence, “Error’s Endless Train: Why Students Don’t Perceive Errors,” *Journal of Basic Writing*, 1 (Spring, 1975), 23-43.

students have great trouble spotting which makes it impossible to generalize that basic writers fail to see errors because the errors represent ignorance in the first place.

We teach editing by having students edit their own papers and those of their colleagues. We also do sentence by sentence editing of papers as a group, where the students are directed to both look for patterns of error, in order to draw conclusions about the kinds of errors and sources of errors, and to speculate in general on editing as a strategy. This allows instructors the occasion to offer the standard advice about reading out loud and reading from bottom to top. Students do all their editing in red, with errors both circled and corrected on a separate sheet, so that the instructors can work with individual students to chart and document the patterns that emerge. This allows the instructors to identify the students who can manage editing on their own, or with only a minimum of coaching, and those who will require close individual supervision in order to cope with both the errors that they have the resources to correct but cannot find, and those errors that they cannot find and cannot correct. We have found that no matter how similar the kinds of errors students make, a diagnosis of those errors leads us to sources so bound to individual problems and individual styles as to make general instruction virtually impossible, with the exception of instruction in a generally unknown piece of punctuation like the semicolon.

By giving students typed copies of their papers to work with, by highlighting groups of three lines and indicating the number of errors these lines contain, by reading passages out loud and having students read their writing out loud, we can determine which errors lie beyond a student's immediate competence, and we have found that we can both increase a student's ability to spot errors and develop those reflexes that allow him to make decisions about correct forms. It has become commonplace to note that such decisions can be made independently of "knowledge about" language, without, that is, knowledge of school book grammar. Once students learn to spot errors on the page, which is a matter of learning to see their language as a language, a significant percentage of students we work with have the resources to correct a significant percentage of the errors themselves.¹⁴ We encourage students to trust their own "sense" of correctness and to test that "sense" against

14. This is an impression. I have no data on this at this time although we have begun research in this area.

the editing we do as a group. We want to assist, then, the natural process of testing and rule formation. In individual sessions with students, we remain as silent as possible, serving primarily to focus their attention on the page. Students chart their own errors looking for patterns and speculating on what the patterns mean in terms of their own specific activity as writers. We insist, however, that students provide their own names for the errors they observe, since it makes no pedagogical sense for them to work from our labels through to the phenomena they observe in their own writing, particularly if the goal of the instruction is to allow students to develop their own resources for correcting.

Finally, however, we are left with a core of students who make a set of errors that they cannot find and do not have the resources to correct. The difficulty here is finding a way to talk with students about their writing, since such talk will inevitably need to revert to grammatical terms and concepts. Here we have reached the point where there is information, “knowing about,” students must have. Shaughnessy isolates four key grammatical concepts that teachers and students will need to share for such conversations to be possible: the concept of the sentence, of inflection, of tense, and of agreement.¹⁵ In our Basic Reading and Writing course, the course where problems are such that this kind of instruction is often required, we use a series of sentence-combining exercises that run throughout the semester, so that we have an additional resource for talking to students about constituents of syntax. Our instruction at this level, however, is based almost entirely on the sample exercises in *Errors and Expectations*.

BASIC READING AND WRITING

This 6-hour course was developed in response to a need to provide another mode of instruction for students with skills equivalent to the third, or bottom level of proficiency described by Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectations*.¹⁶ Students are identified for the course on the basis of a writing sample and the Nelson-Denny Reading test. Of the group

15. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*, 128-159. Shaughnessy also makes a basic distinction between grammatically based errors and performance based errors.

16. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*, 2. This course was designed with the assistance of Professor Anthony Petrosky, University of Pittsburgh School of Education, and tested in a pilot study in fall term, 1977.

identified for the course, approximately the bottom 5% of the freshman class, the mean vocabulary score on the Nelson-Denny Reading test was 24.1 (the 8th percentile for grade 13) and the mean comprehension score was 18 (the 35th percentile), with the mean total score falling at the 29th percentile. No one scored above 40 on the vocabulary test or 27 on the test of comprehension, and scores went as low as 10 in vocabulary (with 10% at or below 15 and 24% at or below 20) and as low as 9 in comprehension (with 24% at or below 15).

These are students whom we found could read through an essay like those found in freshman readers but who seemed powerless to make any response to the reading. When they were done reading, they literally had nothing to say, and we came to define comprehension for our own purposes as the ability to follow an act of reading with a written response that was pertinent and coherent. We learned from a survey that they were also students, who had, by and large, never read a book. They had crammed for tests from textbooks, and had learned to strip-mine books for term papers, but most of them had never had the experience of working from cover to cover through books of their own choosing, of deciding what to read and paying consistent deliberate attention to a text.

In designing a course, we were seeking, then, to provide for students who were not being served by the existing Basic Writing courses. We decided that these needs would not be best served by an additional semester of writing instruction, since the additional time for writing offered by an extra 15 weeks is really no time at all given the extremely slow growth of writing abilities and the diminishing returns of back to back writing courses, where students are actually denied the opportunity to test new behavior against “real” writing situations or to allow these newly found skills to follow their own developmental sequence. We decided, rather, to argue for more concentrated instruction at the outset, where we could double the amount of writing and the time spent analyzing the activity of writing, and where we could include experience with, and analysis of, acts of reading.

The design of the course, in part, was motivated by my frustration with the existing reading instruction on campus. I had done some work with reading specialists and had grave reservations about the model of reading presented through instruction in reading skills. Such instruction relies primarily on exercises that take the paragraph as the basic unit of a reader’s comprehension. In a reading “lab,” students read paragraphs in order to answer questions on main ideas, vocabulary and inferences. Whether or not the paragraph is the key unit in reading comprehension,

and I doubt it is, comprehending a paragraph isolated in a workbook is so very different from comprehending a paragraph embedded in a whole text, and so very different from comprehending a whole text, as to make it virtually impossible for one to stand for the other. With the workbook approach, students can take a semester of reading instruction without, in effect, ever doing any reading, at least as reading means reading whole texts. And the overriding problem with the concept of a single, identifiable “main idea” that all readers will agree upon is that it denies readers their own transaction with a text, and it denies them the perception that reading is such a transaction, not a series of attempts to guess at meanings that belong to someone else. It does not involve a student in an active process of meaning-making, where meaning is determined by the individual reader, his purpose for reading and prior understanding of the subject. In fact, the exercises used in reading skills instruction are set up as if these variables didn’t exist, or as if they were just static, mere annoyances.

We also decided not to model our curriculum on the study skills approach to reading, which is, more or less, instruction in how to read a text book, and which becomes, given the ethos of such survival courses, instruction in how to avoid reading by learning to read only topic sentences or tables of contents. Our goal was to offer reading as a basic intellectual activity, a way of collecting and shaping information. As such, we were offering reading as an activity similar, if not identical, to writing. The skills we were seeking to develop were not skills intrinsic to “encoding” or “decoding;” that is, they were not basic or constituent skills, like word attack skills, vocabulary skills or the ability to recognize paragraph patterns.

We wanted to design a pedagogy to replace those that define reading as the accurate reception of information fixed in a text, and fixed at the level of the sentence or the paragraph, since that representation of reading reflects our students’ mistaken sense of what it means to read. They see the inevitable confusion that comes with working through a whole text, at least one worth reading, as evidence that they have “gotten lost” or “missed something.” They are primarily concerned that they can’t remember everything they read. This, they feel, is what separates them from “good” readers. In place of this misrepresentation, this inability to imagine themselves as readers reading (for what reader doesn’t forget?), we wanted to offer a model that allowed them to postpone their immediate need for certainty in order to read for the larger context that makes individual bits of information meaningful, or

worth remembering. We wanted to offer a model of comprehension that allowed students to work with whole texts and to see the ways in which reading requires that they re-assemble a text in their own terms by discovering patterns of significance that are as much statements about themselves as readers as they are statements about a text. This interaction between reader and text is the source of those meanings that transform the paraphrasable content of the text into some other form of meaning.

We were not concerned, then, with decoding, with questions about what a text said, but with what one could say about a text and with what could be said about any individual act of saying. Extended written responses were the only way of representing the kind of comprehension we were interested in teaching, and such written records were the only source of inquiry into the acts of comprehension our students could, at any moment, perform.

We reviewed the recent work in psycholinguistics and reading, work which defines comprehension in terms of the processing of syntax, where general fluency and comprehension can be developed through activities like sentence-combining. Some of the work in this area, like the work by Stotsky¹⁷ and Sternglass,¹⁸ is quite compelling and may be appropriate for students with problems different in kind from those we confronted in our students. We felt, in designing the course, that our concern should be with acts of comprehension beyond the sentence or the paragraph, and our bias towards larger units of discourse was justified by later findings from the research we did on the course. We administered a series of Cloze tests, which are tests of literal comprehension, of the ability to process syntax and predict meaning, and we found that all of our students, even with the tests at the beginning of the term, scored above the level that indicates adequate literal comprehension of texts whose readability was scaled at grade 13. We concluded that students' low reading speeds, their general failure to comprehend or give adequate response and the general difficulty they had with academic reading tasks must be attributed to something other than difficulty processing syntax.

17. Sandra L. Stotsky, "Sentence-Combining as a Curricular Activity: Its Effect on Written Language Development and Reading Comprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9(Spring, 1975), 30-71.

18. Marilyn S. Sternglass, "Composition Teacher as Reading Teacher," *College Composition and Communication*, 27 (December, 1976). See also, Marilyn S. Sternglass, "Developing Syntactic Fluency in the Reading Process," ERIC.

The writing assignments in the course were developed on the same principles as those for the Basic Writing course described earlier. There were two types of reading assignments, each defining a different context for reading. Students read regularly in class from books of their own choosing.¹⁹ If, as is certainly the case, students learn to read complete texts by reading complete texts, and if our students have little or no experience with this, then a reading class ought to be a place where people read. And ours was—twice a week, for 30 and then 45 minutes we all, students and teachers, sat and read. Our primary goal was to help students develop the discipline and attention it takes to sit down and pay consistent, careful attention to a book. Many of the students in the classes I taught confessed that this experience was entirely new to them. By the amount of reading in these books that went on outside of class, and on the basis of conversations I've had with students since the course, there is reason to believe that some students discovered the habit of reading.

For this in-class reading, students declared an area to read in, something they had always wanted to have the time to pursue, and they went to the library or bookstore and prepared a list of books to read. After each reading session, students wrote in a journal they kept as a record of their reading. At first these entries were open. Students were asked to record whatever struck them as important in what they read. As the course developed, we asked for more formal representations of what they had read—summaries, comparisons with earlier reading, or speculation about where the book was going, and so on. We reviewed the journals each week and used them as the basis for conferences on individual problems.

There was also a core of seven assigned texts, all relating to the theme of "Identity and Change" which provided the subject for the course. The books represented a variety of modes—fiction, autobiography and analytical works written for a general academic audience.

We approached the reading in three ways. Initially we asked students to talk about their experience with a particular text and, in response to these discussions, to look for patterns in the experience that their colleagues reported. The primary goal was to define reading as a human activity, one that can be understood in intimate, personal terms rather

19. For a description of "sustained silent reading" see: Charles Cooper and Tony Petrosky, "A Psycholinguistic View of the Fluent Reading Process," *Journal of Reading*, (December, 1976).

than in terms of mystery or maxims. By talking about where people got stuck and what they did, about the anxiety and frustration they felt, about what one can expect to remember and what any reader is sure to forget, we could also make specific points about successful reading—about dealing with unfamiliar words, for example, or dealing with the confusion that always comes with the beginning of a book. We were allowing students a way of imagining what reading is like in order to imagine themselves as readers.

We also asked students to analyze reading as a task, as something necessarily embodying a strategy, in order to have them draw conclusions about the strategies underlying and perhaps inhibiting their own behavior as readers, behavior they are quick to believe lies totally outside their control. We approach the analysis of reading strategy in two ways. Strategy is seen as the deliberate approach to a specific text and purpose for reading, so that a student could be prepared to talk, for example, about the best strategy for reading a textbook. But students' reading is also analyzed to reveal those predictable individual responses, strategic but not at the level of deliberate strategy, that characterize an individual's reading style. By enabling students to perceive the decisions they make while reading, we make other decisions possible. This kind of discussion of reading also provides the occasion for instructors to make specific points about pre-reading, re-reading, underlining and so on.

The bulk of the instruction in reading, however, comes with the writing that is assigned in response to the reading, and with the work students do during class in groups to prepare reports on what they've read. With few exceptions, the assignments require students to write about the books before there is any discussion in class. The students use writing, then, to locate a stance in relation to a book and to locate something to say. The discussion in class begins with these individual positions and considers them in relation to the text, to each other, and to the specific task set by the assignment.

The assignments, and they are all variations on a single assignment, define a heuristic for the reading process, a model of how a thoughtful reader responds to a book. We assume that a text becomes meaningful and acquires a structure, or a set of intentions, through a reader's own immediate needs (which includes his imagined purpose for reading) and prior experience with the subject (or what he defines as a "subject"), both of which determine patterns of significance in a text. The process of assigning significance is central to the version of reading we were teaching in our classes, since it is a way of demonstrating how one

connects with a book, how a book becomes meaningful through a personal rather than formulaic transaction.

If, after locating patterns of significance, students were to record what they “know” about a book, they would record summaries of sections that stand out for them as somehow important. They would, to use the jargon of tagmemics, have segmented the phenomena into manageable units (and, in analyzing their responses, we found that our students tended to see “particles” and “waves” rather than “fields”), but the representation would still be at the level of narrative. Our goal was to move students from narrative to some position from which they could conceptualize, from which they could see the information or patterns of information they have located as representative, as having meaning beyond any summary or report. In teaching reading, then, we are finally teaching that process of naming, of locating conceptual analogs, of discovering a language that can move the information in the book to the level of dialectic. Teaching reading, then, is teaching invention, that skill we defined as most “basic” to the development of these students as writers.

Because I did research on this part of the curriculum, I have evidence that it was successful, beyond my own and my students’ enthusiasm for a course that allows people to read and write rather than be condemned to the drudgery of workbooks or textbooks. The pre- and post-tests of reading comprehension (the Nelson-Denny Reading Test) showed little change. This, however, ran counter to the instructor’s impression of what happened to these students as readers. The reason for the lack of statistical evidence of change, we feel, is due to the nature of the available reading tests, tests that ask students to read paragraphs and identify main ideas. It can be argued that tests like these monitor students’ ability to take such tests, not their ability as readers, since they don’t pose real reading situations and since they are based on such a limited notion of comprehension itself.²⁰

The pre- and post-tests of writing ability, however, showed very different results. Students taking the six hour course showed significant improvement on a standardized test of writing ability (*STEP*), a holistic assessment, and the Daly-Miller measure of writing anxiety. In every case, the Basic Reading and Writing students began the semester well

20. James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner, *Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 123-124.

behind students in the regular Basic Writing course, and in every case they ended the 15 weeks on almost an exact par with those students at the end of their 15 week course. So if the purpose of the concentrated course was to bring this special group to the level of the general population in a single term, that purpose was achieved.

DIAGNOSIS AND EVALUATION

It's hard to know how to describe the students who take our basic writing courses beyond saying that they are the students who take our courses. Students are screened for basic writing during summer orientation. They write an essay which is holistically scored and take the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Forms C and D). The mean SAT verbal score for those taking Basic Writing last fall was 429, with scores ranging from 240 to 580. The mean SAT verbal score for those taking Basic Reading and Writing was 362, with scores ranging from 200 to 480.

Those of us working with basic writing programs ought to be concerned about our general inability to talk about basic writing beyond our own institutions, at least as basic writing is a phenomenon rather than a source. We know that we give tests and teach courses and we know that this is done at other schools, but we know little else since there is no generally accepted index for identifying basic writing. Perhaps the only way to compare one's students with those elsewhere, since there is a good reason to be suspicious of SAT scores or error counts or objective tests, is by sharing something like the essays that are used as models to prepare readers for holistic readings. I can briefly describe the writing that characterizes our "range-finders" by pointing to three features we have isolated in a study of orientation essays written by students whose instructors felt they were correctly advised into Basic Writing. The first feature is the type and frequency of error. Since our analysis was based on Mina Shaughnessy's taxonomy of error in *Errors and Expectations*, there is no need to provide any explanation of "type" except to say that it is possible to distinguish between "deep" errors and those that are characteristic of the writing of more fluent students.

The second feature we identified was coherence, coherence as evidence of relatedness between sentences and larger units of discourse, but coherence also as evidence of the ability to define a subject as a problem that can be addressed systematically. While reading the essays, we look for evidence that the writer imagines the act of writing as doing

something, no matter how conventional that “something” might be. We identify those students whose papers lack either type of coherence as basic writers.

The third characteristic feature presents the biggest problem to our readers since, at one remove, it seems to be a universal characteristic of student writing. We found, in our analysis of the writing of basic writers, that even when presented with an assignment that specifically called for it, these students were unable to draw general conclusions. If asked to describe a time when they made a decision and to draw some conclusions about decision-making, most writers could report an experience, but few could offer more in the way of a generalization than a single sentence (“Therefore decision making is difficult.”) or a collection of maxims (“Experience is the best teacher.” “Follow your conscience.”).

When we contrasted these essays with those written by writers with higher holistic ratings, we found the successful writers were, in fact, often able to represent themselves as decision-makers as well as someone making a simple decision. They were able to see their experience as representative experience, and to extend the general discussion dialectically, so that they began to manipulate the terms they had used to re-name their experience (terms like “peer pressure,” “responsibility,” “deduction”) in order to represent that experience as something other than what it was for them when they began writing. Where their papers never went beyond narrative, the narrative was shaped so that, in itself, it was clearly making some point that remained unarticulated. The basic writers, on the other hand, produced undifferentiated accounts of experience, in which the representation of the experience could be described as a random recollection of what happened ordered, at best, by chronology. We have many students taking Basic Writing, then, who are not “bound by error,” as that phrase is illustrated by the writing of the students Shaughnessy studied.

One of the most difficult questions a program director faces is the question of what, exactly, a passing grade in a writing course represents. The university operates with an Algebra I/Algebra II paradigm—fifteen weeks of Algebra I and a test determine who goes on to Algebra II. Given the very real difficulty of measuring, or even defining, proficiency in writing, and given the irregular pace and nature of growth in writing for any group of students, there is no such thing as knowing exactly what any grade “means” in terms of actual writing ability. At the same time,

however, because enrollment in basic writing represents an institution's judgment that the student lacks skills necessary for full participation in the college curriculum, a passing grade in basic writing is expected to stand as certification that such skills have been acquired. The question we faced was how to reasonably determine that a passing grade in Basic Writing did indicate a specified level of proficiency without misrepresenting the limits of our ability to make judgments about writing ability. We finally settled on an end of term review for all Basic Writing students.

At the end of each semester, students in all Basic Writing sections are given two hours to write an in-class essay. The two hours are meant to provide ample time for preparing, revising and editing. Each essay is then evaluated by members of the complete composition staff who make only a pass/fail distinction. A "pass" on the exam means that a student has demonstrated the proficiency assumed of students in the opening weeks of our general composition courses. The models, or "range-finders," we use to prepare readers for the reading were chosen by the staff after considering hundreds of student papers written during a trial examination program.

We also provide both students and instructors, however, with a general set of criteria that are the result of our attempt to summarize features that have distinguished passing from failing essays. In order to pass, students must be able to write a paper that

- is reasonably error free—"reasonableness" makes allowances for commonly misspelled words, errors with fine points of punctuation or unobtrusive errors of punctuation, errors with "who" and "whom"; "reasonableness," that is, makes allowances for the kinds of errors most of us make and those instructors are generally willing to tolerate in freshman writing,
- is coherent—which means that what is said can be understood and understood as an attempt to address the assigned problem systematically,
- shows the ability to state general principles on the basis of specific evidence, and to develop a general discussion beyond a single sentence.

A failing score on the essay does *not* mean that a student fails the course. Holistic scoring, particularly of essays written under such

artificial conditions, is simply not reliable enough to allow us to make that kind of decision. When a student fails the essay review, a folder containing all his work for the term is reviewed by a committee of three staff members. If the work done in the last quarter of the term confirms the judgment made by the readers, the student is not given credit for the course. At the end of a semester of Basic Reading and Writing, on the other hand, students are either passed on to Basic Writing or passed into the general curriculum without restriction.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

REINFORCEMENT

The editors invite articles describing and/or analyzing the development of writing skills in fields other than English, what the British call "writing across the curriculum." Prospective authors should focus on the kinds of writing demanded in the physical and natural sciences, the social sciences, business, or technical writing. Authors might touch as well on the philosophical aims of the discipline as reflected in writing characteristic of the field, e.g., the abstract, the resume, the book review, the critical essay, the summary of research.

Deadline for articles: October 15, 1979.

REVISION

The editors invite articles describing methods of teaching students how to "re-see" their papers, whether for the purpose of entirely recasting, for adding or deleting parts, or for changing tone or emphasis. Authors should describe the theory supporting their approach to teaching revision.

Deadline for articles: January 30, 1980.

Articles should be no more than 6,000 words (about 20 pages). Please follow the MLA Style Sheet, second edition, for matters of form. Include all footnotes at the end of the article. Enclose two copies of the article and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Manuscripts and correspondence should be addressed to: The Editors, Journal of Basic Writing, Instructional Resource Center, 535 E. 80th Street, New York, New York 10021.

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