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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION

The movement to implement writing across the curriculum has been around long enough to begin to draw conclusions. The roots of the movement are several and strong. Departments in all disciplines have learned that even their traditional students will not develop, without considerable practice, the writing proficiency befitting liberal arts graduates, entry-level engineers, or graduate students in the professions. Moreover, colleges with writing proficiency criteria for graduation have learned that students who entered college under-prepared will not retain as seniors even the basic skills gained in their English composition courses if these skills are not frequently exercised throughout the college years. Departments on many campuses have begun to see that the national decline in verbal skills on achievement tests has not been met locally by redoubled efforts to bring students up to former levels of proficiency, but by a gradual erosion of the quantities of writing assigned in their courses and a decline in the standards used to evaluate that writing as a measure of the student's grasp of the material. Most important, perhaps, to long term interest in extending writing beyond the composition sequence is the growing theoretical and experimental support for the view that writing about a subject enhances and deepens the mastery of it, a view strongly confirmed by the intuition of every writer who has put pen to page to find out what he knows, to discover his areas of ignorance.

This collection of papers presents examples of only some of the attempts to implement programs of writing across the curriculum. Some programs have encouraged faculty members outside composition programs to require more writing in their courses and tried to maximize the effectiveness of the instruction in writing that might go on. These programs have taken the form of training workshops and seminars, attended voluntarily or for pay. Other programs have attempted to co-ordinate the efforts of writing instructors and subject matter instructors through such strategies as paired courses, collaboratively taught block programs,

collaboratively designed courses, writing workshops coordinated with courses, and writing tutors working either in writing labs or with specific professors.

On some campuses, these attempts to improve the quality and quantity of writing instruction have been accompanied by broader curricular reforms. At some institutions this reform consists of a few new composition or subject matter courses containing substantial amounts of writing, with suitable adjustments in class size, course content, and credit. At other institutions the commitment is greater: every course is to be used as a background for teaching writing; or, alternatively, each department must establish standards for proficiency in the kinds of writing suitable to the discipline, require the kinds of writing that build and measure that proficiency, and certify each of its majors as proficient before graduation. Departmental responsibility has produced departmental strategies: set numbers of papers of set lengths and types in introductory and upper division courses, even the reinstatement of the senior paper.

There are, additionally, lessons of successful course and writing assignment design. Better writing and more learning seem to result when longer assignments like term papers are broken into stages on a definite timetable; when students write several short papers rather than a single longer one; when several short assignments have been designed to lead to a longer, conceptually more complex one; when assignments are carefully worded and elaborately detailed; when students have the opportunity to clarify their initial understanding of the assignment and get feedback on their first drafts. Finally, the writing done must accommodate not only the discipline but specific course objectives. While most courses will emphasize expository prose of various types, students in an art history course exploring the creative impulse as it manifests itself in different media may be asked to write poetry.

The most important lesson of the movement to reinstate writing across the curriculum may be the lesson of vigilance—shocked recognition of the fact that institutions of all types and circumstances have drifted little by little away from a central truth and proven, necessary methods. Careful writing and close reading foster literate modes of thinking, modes of thinking that emphasize high levels of logic, explicitness, clarity, and tact. If these are qualities of mind of continuing value to our civilization, our students must do the sustained, rigorous reading and writing by which they are developed.

Elaine P. Maimon

CINDERELLA TO HERCULES: DEMYTHOLOGIZING WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

At colleges and universities that have committed themselves to writing across the curriculum, instructors in all disciplines teach the writing skills appropriate within their fields, and they purposefully use writing assignments—both formal and informal—as a way to teach concepts in their courses. At these institutions the English department shares with all other departments the responsibility for helping all students to attain a high level of literacy—a literacy that is broadly-based, inclusive, and appropriate to students who would call their education liberal.

Writing across the curriculum is not a fad, although there are some in the academy who suspect so. Especially at large urban institutions, many faculty members believe that any idea dependent on trust, cooperation, and commitment can be implemented only at friendly little private colleges that receive big foundation grants. The scoffers may be right to the extent that the recommitment to a fundamental principle may have a more dramatic impact at a small college. But the point of this essay is that the idea of writing across the curriculum is fundamental to teaching at institutions of all sizes and shapes. The purpose of this essay is to present some suggestions that may help English teachers who want to establish an institution-wide program.

The first step is to remind ourselves and then others that the teaching of writing and reading is essential to teaching in all fields. To say that scholars write is to say the obvious. One might as well add that teachers teach. Scholarship in all disciplines—across the curriculum—is defined by

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written texts. Scholars who offer students an apprenticeship in reading and in creating written texts in their fields are in that sense teachers of writing, experts in the rhetoric of their own disciplines. This notion of the scholar in any field as an expert rhetorician is deeply rooted in the history of the liberal arts. The medieval trivium—grammar, rhetoric, and logic—was the foundation of all liberal learning. The foremost scholars in the classical, medieval, and Renaissance worlds were all rhetoricians—scholars and teachers of the writing as well as the ideas in their disciplines. We need only a quick look at Edward Corbett’s “A Survey of Rhetoric” in his *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* to find the names of leaders in diverse disciplines—Aristotle, Erasmus, Francis Bacon, John Quincy Adams—listed among his noteworthy rhetoricians.

Unfortunately, the world of twentieth-century American education has become so fragmented that teachers can delude themselves into thinking that they teach something called “content,” while specialists teach reading, writing, and even thinking. Getting back to the basics ought to mean a return to a fundamental principle—a renewed commitment to teaching students to write, to read, and to think about content. Then all scholars, experts in the academic discourse of their own disciplines, would guide apprentices, not merely to know, but to express knowledge and thought first to themselves, then to each other, and finally to a wider audience. “Writing across the curriculum,” “writing as a cross-disciplinary endeavor,” “cooperative efforts to teach writing” would then be perceived not merely as the new phrases of last season, but as essential working principles for all of us in the academy.

But just because an idea is fundamental, it is not consequently easy to implement in our complicated academic institutions. As the chairman of sociology at my own institution put it: “I’ll come to your damned writing workshop, but remember—I never promised you a prose garden.” It is in the nature of fundamental ideas that they often lie buried under the debris of myth and misconception. At institutions large or small, private or public, we who would institute a program of writing in the total curriculum undertake a large task, one which requires freeing ourselves from myths and misconceptions, if we would not fruitlessly multiply our efforts. It cannot be overemphasized that the success of the enterprise depends on the capacity of everyone at the institution—faculty, administration, and students—to perceive that writing across the curriculum does not mean grammar across the curriculum or even verbal skills across the curriculum but more generally an emphasis across the curriculum on composition—the arrangement of parts into meaningful wholes.

Administrators are particularly susceptible to a narrow definition of writing. They are usually happy when they hear that the idea of writing

across the curriculum is abroad in the land, and they respond, sometimes too quickly, by asking the coordinator of freshman composition to develop a simple list of competencies so that all instructors at the institution can be held accountable for their designated part in the teaching of writing. This story may be apocryphal, but I have heard of one administrator who thought that semi-colons could be the special responsibility of the social science division, while commas might belong to the scientists. The philosophy department might teach subordinate clauses, while the English department alone would teach the gerund, since no one else—except the foreign language people—would know or care about the gerund.

This apocryphal administrator believes in the Myth of the Simple Rules—the misconception that writing is defined strictly in terms of its surface features. He may believe that the English department can and should instruct the rest of the faculty in these simple rules of grammar and mechanics, thus enabling all the faculty to teach writing, and suspect that any resistance to this idea merely reflects fear of losing faculty lines if everyone gets into the act.

This definition of writing in terms of its surface features is more pernicious and complicated when it is shared by members of the English department. Within the English department this misconception has another name: the Myth of Cinderella. Many literary scholars tend to see the teaching of writing as a menial task, with the English faculty in the role of Cinderella. According to this version of the story, the beautiful, literary princess is forced to live in rags and to serve instructors in other departments, those ugly step-sisters who loll around, giving only multiple-choice exams.

The English department Cinderellas know that there is no simple way to teach writing. But many of them, in their despair over teaching what they consider an art, may believe that the only teachable part of the writing process is defined in terms of fixing up the surface infelicities of a finished product. These English professors trap themselves by their limited definition of teaching composition. By defining writing as a mechanical skill, they guarantee that their teaching of composition will bore them inconsoably and embitter them as they consider how the light of their graduate education is spent. Yearning to teach literature, they will be impatient, frustrated, and unhappy with their composition courses. When blamed by their colleagues for the *Newsweek* writing crisis, these literary scholars will tactlessly demand that everyone had better help with the dirty work or shut up. (“We stay up half the night correcting themes, while you do nothing but add up the number of true and false answers.”)

These Cinderellas are forgetting the lesson of Tom Sawyer and his fence:

If English department professors think that the teaching of writing is a menial task, so will everyone else. If English department professors think that the teaching of writing is a stimulating intellectual activity, others may think so, too. Without the help of a fairy godmother, English department Cinderellas must transform themselves into scholars of composition. Even a common pumpkin can become a golden coach, if English teachers learn to see that the teaching of writing is “scholarly, not scullery.”¹ A scholar of composition can also present more articulate arguments to deans and others who persist in believing in the Myth of the Simple Rules.

When instructors outside the English department espouse the Myth of the Simple Rules and define writing in terms of its surface features, they have a predictable but illogical reaction to the idea of an institution-wide writing program. On the one hand, they object to doing “the English department’s job,” while on the other hand, they fear that rejecting a cross-disciplinary emphasis on writing will give disproportionate power to the English department. A new myth—the Myth of Empire—is born. Since the Myth of Empire is based on irrational premises, it can be a particularly stubborn misconception. Well reasoned arguments may have no impact. But it might be advisable for those working to establish a cross-disciplinary writing program to point out that any institution that is committed to producing graduates who write adequately has two clear choices: (1) a required course in writing taught by the English department for every undergraduate every semester from freshman through senior year—a requirement that would give students needed practice in writing and that would also produce English department elephantiasis; or, (2) an institution-wide commitment to the study and practice of the writing appropriate to each discipline. Only the second option is sensible, and, paradoxically, the institution-wide commitment may realistically provide a safe-guard against the disproportionate expansion of the English department guaranteed by the first option.

The Myth of Empire can sometimes be dispelled by good will and good works within the English department. If an institution has any composition requirement at all, even a single semester requirement, then the English department should make that course truly cross-disciplinary. Rather than taking a “we-know-best” attitude and making unilateral selections of reading and writing assignments, the composition staff could seek suggestions for reading and writing tasks from colleagues in other fields.

¹This phrase was coined by Professor Norman Johnston, chairman of the Beaver College sociology department, the same person who never promised me a prose garden. Sometimes people deliver more than they promise.

No one expects English instructors to teach sociology and biology (just as no one expects sociologists and biologists to teach English), but English instructors can help students to prepare for the writing and reading requirements in all disciplines, not excluding English literature. If the composition syllabus includes Lewis Thomas and Philip Reiff along with James Joyce, English instructors will not so easily be accused of empire-building.

Also, colleagues in other disciplines express surprise—and sometimes open gratitude—when English instructors show even a little respect for the writing done by people other than literary artists or critics. Dating from their days as impressionable undergraduates, many social scientists and scientists (and even a few humanists) are accustomed to the disdain of English teachers. When we in the English department assume that scholars in fields other than English know little or nothing about good writing, we feed a misconception—the Myth of Inadequacy. If our colleagues perceive that we regard everything in their professional journals as jargon and gobbledygook, we won't have much luck in convincing them to incorporate more writing in their courses. In fact, we may unwittingly convince them that they are not really competent to assess anything other than multiple-choice and short-answer tests.

Admittedly, there is plenty of writing in *The American Sociological Review* that we do not want our students to emulate, just as there is plenty of writing in *PMLA* that exemplifies much that we want our students to avoid. Scholars in the social sciences have been known to produce gobbledygook, but they have also produced the pellucid prose of a George Miller. We must help our colleagues outside English departments to break out of the Myth of Inadequacy. Then they can guide their own apprentices to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff in the prose in each field. If we approach our colleagues with respect rather than with condescension, we can even work together to make these discriminations. Scholars in English are experts in language, while scholars in other fields have a particular sense of what is appropriate and what is not in those specialized genres that we never studied in graduate school: the laboratory report, the philosophical argument, and the case study, for example. Our colleagues can teach their students—and us—more than they realize about the nature of evidence in their own fields, about the expectations of specialized audiences, and about conventions of form in their own disciplines. If we respect and draw upon what our colleagues know about writing, we will be in a better position to influence them positively in matters of syntax and lexicon.

Because colleagues need to trust each other if they are to learn from each other, it is essential for us to dispel the Myth of Inadequacy. The key to an

institution-wide writing program is a commitment to learning together, to what administrators call faculty development. This scholarly enterprise of sharing ideas about writing can go on formally or informally, in faculty writing workshops or over lunch. The first step is to practice the rhetoric that we teach by talking about the teaching of writing whenever we can get colleagues to listen. Even at large institutions, we occasionally run into people in other disciplines at the faculty club or on the tennis court. Even better, we can talk about writing during some of the deadly time spent on university-wide committees, especially those newly established committees formed to revise the General Education requirements. We might even be able to guide that committee discussion to the idea of writing as fundamental to general education.

We should also seek more formal opportunities to present our research in composition to our colleagues. Most institutions sponsor a series of research reports by faculty members, and those of us involved in composition studies should use these occasions to communicate the growing intellectual excitement in our field.

The composition staff can encourage faculty development by measures other than public performance. We can send colleagues in other disciplines a list of the reading assignments for freshman composition, and we can ask for their suggestions and comments. If we require a grammar handbook in freshman composition, we can offer to order desk copies for instructors in other disciplines whom we have convinced to add the handbook to the required list on their syllabi. These faculty development activities are appropriate at large institutions and at small; they can be undertaken with or without funding. The more intensive the commitment—monetary and otherwise—to faculty development in writing, the more dramatic the results. In smaller institutions, the change will be more perceptible, but even in the largest and most impersonal institutions faculty development in the teaching of writing is not wasted.

At institutions that have funds designated for faculty development, we should lobby with the administration to spend some of that money on a faculty writing workshop. The appropriate design for such a workshop varies from institution to institution. At some places, faculty members need to be gradually eased into a workshop situation; at other places a core of instructors are ready for an extended period of study after which they will stimulate others to seek the same experience. Instituting formal faculty development activities requires an incisive analysis of a particular institution's traditions, strengths, prejudices, and problems. If at all possible, it is probably advantageous to invite an outside expert to lead the first workshop. People in house could probably do as well or better, but we

cannot underestimate the mystique of the outsider. At the very least, workshop participants will be more polite.

Whether the workshop is planned for several weeks or for several hours, three essential topics should be covered:

- the design of clear and productive writing assignments,
- ways to respond helpfully and fairly to student papers at various stages of the writing process,
- the use of short, ungraded writing activities that make writing an expected and inevitable part of the teaching and learning process.

In longer workshops, ideally, participants should be encouraged to share their own writing.

If an institution does commit itself to conducting a workshop on the teaching of writing, no one should be surprised to see all the aforementioned myths surfacing, along with at least two others that I will call the Myth of the Magistrate and the Myth of the Martyr. According to the Myth of the Magistrate, all examples of student writing must be graded, evaluated, or otherwise judged by the instructor, who is the only certified magistrate of such activities. These instructors also believe in the Myth of the Martyr: the idea that it is necessary to suffer in order to teach or learn composition. But a painstaking and painful assessment of a student's first draft may overwhelm both the reader and the writer and teach nobody anything but despair.

Martyrs and magistrates can profit greatly from faculty workshops, especially those that encourage participants to share their own writing in draft stages. From this process, every prospective teacher of writing is reminded of the solid benefits received from a preliminary response to his writing, a response that addresses concepts, meaning, and intent in the formative stages, well before the piece is ready for meticulous editing and final assessment. As instructors respond to the writing of their own peers, they may even come to see that the students in their classes can be enlisted to serve as readers of early drafts of their classmates' papers. Students who might justifiably resent being assessed by a classmate can learn to welcome the active response of peers to a project that has not reached its final form. Kenneth Bruffee of Brooklyn College, who has developed the most sensible procedures that I know of for the collaborative learning of writing, writes as follows, "If in our insecurity bred in ignorance we learned best collaboratively, then perhaps our students in their insecurity bred in their ignorance might find it easier to learn collaboratively, too."²

²"A New Intellectual Frontier," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 27, 1978, p. 40.

When a faculty development workshop focuses on writing, the potential pedagogic benefits are enormous. Not only do faculty members practice techniques that they can use directly in their classrooms, but they also focus their discussions on issues less abstract than “educational theory.” Theoretical issues thus develop from well-defined situations, and those issues are explored for their pragmatic implications.

Faculty members in all disciplines soon see that each classroom, inside and outside the English department, must provide more opportunities for students to write. In fact, writing must become once again an unavoidable part of each academic day. All students will profit from the additional practice in writing, but the students whom Mina Shaughnessy designates as basic writers may not be able to survive academically without this consistent, inevitable reinforcement of their writing skills in all their courses. As Shaughnessy says, students who must expend enormous effort to recode speech into writing need much more practice than they can ever get simply in their composition classes. Shaughnessy calls for ways “to increase students’ involvement with writing across the curriculum. This does not mean simply persuading more teachers in other subjects to require term papers but making writing a more integral part of the learning process in all courses.”³

In faculty workshops participants share ideas to make writing a more explicit feature of the teaching and learning process. Many of these ideas seem so obvious once they are stated that it is amazing that they are not practiced more widely. Even in a large lecture class, for example, the professor can leave five or ten minutes near the end of the period for students to write a summary of the main points covered during that hour. Then one or two students can be asked to read their summaries to the class. Further, as Shaughnessy says, instructors in all disciplines “can encourage in countless ways the habit of writing things down (but not necessarily ‘up’ as finished products).”⁴

When instructors share these obvious and less obvious pedagogic strategies, they also begin to develop a broader perspective on themselves as scholars. A successful faculty development workshop begins to break down the barriers separating disciplines in a way that liberates each scholar from isolation without compromising his or her identity. In fact, scholars who study academic discourse in a number of fields, including their own, find that they understand more clearly the *sui generis* elements in their own disciplines. A faculty writing workshop may even result in a collaborative

³*Errors and Expectations* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 87-88.

⁴*Errors and Expectations*, p. 88.

research project shared in by participants who have learned so much about their own scholarly identities that they are that much better able to cooperate with others on a problem—perhaps even one related to composition that requires the expertise of people trained in a variety of disciplines.

A program of writing across the curriculum cannot be introduced by a lone Hercules. The various myths and misconceptions—Simple Rules, Cinderella, Empire, Inadequacy, Magistrate and Martyr—can be confronted only if we get the cooperation of the rest of the faculty. We can achieve such cooperation when our colleagues in all departments realize that a focus on the improvement of writing leads in general to better teaching and more productive scholarship for all those involved in an institution-wide program.

When instructors in all disciplines understand that writing is a complex process that is integrally involved with the subject matter which is written about, they will not find it so astonishing to be asked to teach the writing appropriate within their disciplines. Since writing requires the active involvement of instructor and students in the learning process of each discipline, students in classes where writing is emphasized cannot passively watch lecturers perform like figures on a television screen. When writing is emphasized in all courses, students cannot passively allege to know things; they have to express what they know, first to themselves and then to others.

At one writing workshop at my own institution, the chairman of the fine arts department asked the group to consider the plight of the student whose primary cognitive style is visual rather than verbal. It was during that discussion that I realized that perhaps we had finally broken through the original myths and misconceptions. We were no longer talking about grammar across the curriculum, or even about verbal skills across the curriculum, but instead about composition in the larger sense: how the mind works in different media—music, art, numbers, words—to arrange fragments into meaningful wholes. By composing ourselves into a liberal arts faculty concerned with writing, we had gone beyond writing to a renewed vision of the liberal arts and the fascinating ways that each discipline puts together and expresses the common vision of minds making meaning. We had given institutional form to John Gerber's prediction: "Seeing ourselves as teachers of reading and writing makes us a community again."⁵

⁵"Suggestions for a Common Sense Reform of the English Curriculum," *College Composition and Communication*, December 1977, pp. 312-13.

Janis Forman

NOTES TOWARD WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: SOME COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Lynne is a typical sophomore at Goucher College, a small and selective private women's college outside of Baltimore. In the year's time after completing freshman English, she has written a personal essay about nature, a review of *Jaws*, a comparative study of paintings by Seurat and Van Gogh, a lab report on the growth of euglena, a sociological abstract of an article on the family, and an analysis of an essay by David Hume. A "solid college experience" at Goucher requires this kind of immersion in new ways of seeing, thinking, and writing. However, it is not surprising that no matter how well Lynne has done in freshman English, she may be baffled by what is expected of her as a writer in other courses. She must become an adept, self-taught rhetorician though she is probably unfamiliar with the conventions of language and style in the disciplines she studies and with the personal biases of her instructors.

Lynne's classmates, when asked in September of 1978 to describe their experiences as writers outside freshman English, confirmed what the faculty had already surmised: current undergraduates have a greater need of specific training in language skills than ever before. Vivian told us,

I chose to major in economics partly because little writing was required (or so I thought). In most of my courses, I was required to write and to write credible papers. During the first two years I was more a short order cook than a writer—whipping many assignments out of the typewriter minutes before they were due. By second semester sophomore year, I realized that there was no way for me to avoid writing in my courses, not even in my major.

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According to Michele,

Since I have been at Goucher, I have had to write some type of report for every class I have taken. The requirements have varied from ten-page term papers to two-page personal essays as the classes have varied from English to health to an accounting course. There are two things that remain the same for each class. Every professor expects something different and grades a paper in his own way.

In the fall of 1979, Goucher offered a new experimental course called *The Composing Process* to address Lynne and her classmates' problems. Among the purposes of this sophomore-level writing course is the creation of a team-teaching and tutoring network to assist students in the writing they do outside freshman English. The course should, in time, become the center of a writing across the curriculum program, a series of new subject-specific courses to which a writing component is linked.

The idea for *The Composing Process* grew out of discussions and team-teaching efforts involving faculty and students during the spring of 1979. I would like to outline the activities that led to the formation of *The Composing Process* before describing how it is designed and operated.

When the faculty was polled by the English Department in the fall of 1978 about the problem of literacy at Goucher, they agreed that students' writing lacked "clarity," "organization," "conciseness of expression," and "precision in the articulation of ideas." This consensus about student writing emerged despite differences in the kinds of writing students do in the various disciplines (abstracts for sociology, lab reports for the sciences, critical essays for English, etc.). Moreover, informal discussions and workshops on the question of literacy brought further agreement among the faculty and an expression of their willingness to solve the problem on a college-wide basis.

As coordinator of writing, the question for me became how the college should address Lynne's and her classmates' problems, how should we translate the College's concern with literacy into changes in the curriculum? The faculty's responses to the Fall '78 questionnaire provided me with a way to begin. I approached several faculty members¹ who had answered the questionnaire in detail and asked them whether I could work with them in or out of class to help them devise a writing component for their courses. Some of them were willing to risk working with a skills specialist who knew

¹Professors Baker, Horn, Jeffrey, Lewand, Morton, Shouldice, and Velder and Dean James Billet supported this project with sound ideas and encouragement.

relatively little about their subject and to weather the difficulties that experimenting with new ways of seeing and teaching might entail. They invited me to team-teach with them, to evaluate classroom activities, and to suggest a variety of writing exercises that could be added to their courses.

I attended a sophomore-level history class and observed that although many of the students had been successful in writing personal essays for freshman English, none of them were successful in producing essays on colonial women. Here their writing was devoid of their personal identities, their individual dictions and styles. This indicated to me that coming to terms with new ideas and ways of thinking about history was so difficult that it left students little time for considering their own personal voices.

Similarly, I had the impression from listening to these students discuss Spruill's *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* that the book was authorless. They talked as if the book contained "the facts of history as they were and are" rather than Spruill's mind working with facts to create a coherent narrative. None of the students recognized that a "story" is written by a person with biases. Nor did they see that a writer selects and orders details to support generalizations, quotes some sources and not others, and develops a thesis. The students assumed that language simply transmits information; they did not seem to know that language—their own writing as well as Spruill's book—shapes information and depicts the writer too.

A second set of class visits—these to an introductory mathematics course—came about when the instructor insisted that my students in a second semester writing course should be able to understand a simple mathematical process called the Fibonacci sequence if it was clearly explained to them. His math students submitted written explanations of the sequence to a group of naive readers—eight volunteers from my second semester writing course who had just written and revised a paper that required them to show the steps of a process. The success of the math students' explanations was mixed. Least successful was the following paragraph:

One obtains the Fibonacci sequence by adding two adjacent numbers. Take the following example: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21 . . . The next number in the sequence would be 34 since $13+21=34$.

The clearest explanation read as follows:

To obtain the Fibonacci sequence one must utilize the operation of addition. The first number in the sequence is 1. Because another number has not yet been included in the sequence to add to 1, the second number is also 1.

At this point our sequence looks like this: 1,1. The third number of the sequence is obtained by adding the first and second numbers in the sequence. Therefore, the third number in the sequence is 2. Now, our sequence looks like this: 1,1,2. The fourth number of the sequence results from adding the last two elements already in the sequence (there being 2 and 1). By adding these, one obtains the number 3. Now, the sequence is as follows: 1,1,2,3. The Fibonacci sequence may be continued by adding the last two numbers of the sequence to obtain the next one. Thus, the sequence would look like this:

1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55,89,...

Students from the writing class responding *in writing* to explanation 1 told the math student that she had “moved too quickly by giving the example and then just briefly illustrating how the sequence worked.” Most of the readers preferred explanation 2. They congratulated the writer for “walking them slowly through the operation” and for “adding a diagram summarizing the explanation at the end to give the reader a second way to look at the sequence.” In class, after students discussed the explanations and critiques, the math instructor extended and qualified the comments of the English students in ways that only an expert reader can. Referring to explanation 1, he pointed out:

“Adjacent numbers” is ambiguous. Adjacent seems to imply some physical closeness, and since any two numbers are separated from each other by an infinity of other numbers, the word adjacent is inappropriate. A better phrase would be “consecutive numbers of the sequence.”

The exchange between the math and English students suggested a format for The Composing Process; students would act as readers and writers for each other and would work with an expert reader, an instructor, who would help them develop their skills even further. The history students’ problems with making connections between research and writing (finding a thesis, developing an individual voice, linking details and generalizations) led to a number of questions addressed in the new course.

In the fall of 1979, The Composing Process attracted second and third year students, two majoring in English and the others in political science, sociology, religion, economics, and art.² At first exclusively writers and

²I wish to thank Deborah Auerbach, Melissa Behringer, Caroline Chamiblis, Vivian Cox, Anne Dimoff, Lynne Dunbrack, Michele Faraone, Tara Fass, and Yvonne Nixon—students in THE COMPOSING PROCESS—for their willingness to work hard and to take risks.

readers, by the end of the semester the students in The Composing Process become tutors, team-teachers, and even advisers for the writing across the curriculum program. The future tutors spend the semester working in small groups as writers and readers of each other's papers. In the first seven weeks of the term they become acquainted with strategies for composing. In the three week segment which follows, they write essays about a play and several short stories, thereby learning the conventions of the literary essay (the specialized vocabulary of literary criticism, the close analysis of texts to support a clearly defined thesis, the rhetorical purposes of metaphoric language, etc.). In the last four weeks, they apply what they have learned in the course to the tutoring and team-teaching that they do for a course outside the English department.³

A number of learning and teaching strategies distinguish The Composing Process. First, students practice methods of invention and revision—strategies for composing—while they work on profiles of themselves as writers. They are asked to reflect upon their past experience as writers, to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, and to identify their goals, at the same time that they learn about their methods of composing and expand them by trying new ones. In writing a personal essay, most of them—for the first time—confront their attitudes about writing, their fears and needs, and their sense of what it means to call themselves “writers”—a self-evaluation particularly useful to the instructor as she shapes the course and to the students as they work on their own writing and respond to others’.

Second, tutors are writers before they begin tutoring. That is, the participants in the seminar work in the same kind of small groups and practice the same methods of composing that are then introduced to the classes outside the English department and to the tutoring sessions. Students move from the first rough draft to the final version of the paper by asking for suggestions and formulating changes in light of the comments they receive. In other words, writers, after sharing their early drafts with peers, revise their work, responding to the critiques and cues that they receive, and to their own “re-vision” of the piece. The readers’ primary responsibility is to determine how best to intervene so as to lead the writer to produce a better piece of prose. These future tutors devise methods for suggesting improvement by looking at each other’s writing, by experiencing and discussing some of the anxiety and frustration that they feel, and by determining which suggestions help most.

³For a full description of how a writing lab operates in which students are writers before they are tutors, see Judith Fishman, “On Tutoring, the Writing Lab, and Writing,” *Composition and Teaching*, 2.

Third, students develop vocabularies for talking about composition and derive criteria for evaluating writing from the questions and problems that emerge from reading their papers in class. In early sessions, students use guidelines that I provide. These direct them first to make simple, specific observations (“Name two strong sentences,” “Name two weak ones,” “Put a straight line under an effective word or phrase,” “Put a wavy line under a word you think should be changed”). Students are asked to re-create for the writer their experience of reading the text (“Tell what was happening to you as you read the piece. When were you attentive? When were you bored or confused? Point to specific places”) and then to analyze the essay (“How was this piece organized?” “What do you think the writer wants to accomplish with the draft?”).⁴

Peer evaluation not only puts the instructor in touch with the kinds of values that students have absorbed about good writing and the criteria that they use to discuss each other’s work, but it also helps the instructor make comments that reach students.⁵ After listening to the ways in which students actually discuss writing, the instructor is likely to put aside her specialized vocabulary for critical evaluation, often meaningful to English teachers alone; labels like “coherence,” “precision,” and “conciseness” are better paraphrased or illustrated until students understand this “short-hand” in the context of their and her concrete responses to the papers they review. The vocabulary of critical evaluation—a specialized language—is then built inductively by the teacher’s adapting the language of criticism to the students’ reading of a particular piece of prose.

When urged to put together their own guidelines, students argue in class about how to “clean up” unfocused questions, develop new ones, and establish a sequence of questions. Reviewing their first drafts of every new piece of writing seems to sprout new questions that they have to investigate and then add to their growing list. The assignments are set up to demand of students increasingly more complex responses. As a result, new, more complex questions about, for instance, diction, syntax, voice, and audience are added to their initial ones.

Fourth, in *The Composing Process*, tutors themselves write for a particular discipline—literature—so that they can anticipate the problems

⁴I am particularly indebted to Kenneth A. Bruffee for his work on the student-centered writing class as described in “Peer-Tutoring Writing Centers,” in *Basic Writing: A Collection of Essays for Teachers, Researchers and Administrators*, eds. Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel Hoebner (NCTE, forthcoming), and John Clifford of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, who invited me to participate in a study of collaborative learning as an approach to the teaching of basic writing when we were graduate fellows in English at Queens College, CUNY.

⁵For an insightful discussion of this process, see Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 40.

that their tutees face. For four weeks the writing class is transformed into Critical Approaches to Literature, and the students struggle to control a vocabulary and form that are foreign to most of them since only two members of the class are English majors. By their attempts to write intelligently about literature, they are once again aware that students fresh from English composition are expected to master the conventions of writing that belong to academic disciplines.⁶

The students quickly realize that the skills that they have acquired in English composition cannot be automatically carried over to their writing about literature. Most of them stumble through the first drafts of their literary essays, because they can not go beyond the “I” of the writer about personal experience to the “I” of the writer about literature without falling into the trap of “themewriting.”⁷ Unwittingly or consciously, the writer sacrifices the characteristic syntax, idiom, and tone evident in her personal essay written earlier in the term and tries to approximate a “professional” voice without as yet having control of the new ways of analyzing literature to which a specialized vocabulary is attached. All that may be evident in her prose is her attachment to the new vocabulary which is to her the most visible mark of the literary essay.

Some students take an easy route, choosing to write a voiceless prose full of predictable generalizations and safe assertions. Others venture into new territory but invariably bump up against the constraints of the literary form they are working with; they may also complain of the instructor’s expectations that they be able to skillfully use in their literary essays their newly acquired critical vocabulary for analyzing literature. Novice critics, how can they write about literature without simply aping the language of the critic? Is it fair, they ask, to expect them to have incorporated in their writing new habits of thought and new ways of inquiring about literature?

There are obviously no simple solutions to the students’ problems. Writing about literature does, however, precipitate the kinds of questions about form, concepts, and language that are central to every kind of specialized writing. As a result, when students critique each other’s literary essays, serving as both writers and readers, they are also being prepared for the tutoring they will do and for the particular limitations and biases of the specialized writing their tutees will be engaged in.

⁶See Mike Rose, “When Faculty Talk About Writing,” *College English*, 41 (Nov. 1979), pp. 272-279 for a consideration of how the biases of faculty members and the conventions of writing for specialized subjects affect the student writer.

⁷William E. Coles, Jr. demonstrates this dilemma faced by students in a fictionalized account of one of his writing classes presented in *The Plural I: The Teaching of Writing* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978).

By the end of the term students in *The Composing Process* are ready for a “trial run” as tutors. They respond to papers written by students in a macro-economics class who are asked to explain the problem of inflation to a group of college-educated readers who have little or no background in the discipline. First, the tutors work together discussing the papers and locating a number of problems shared by the writers. For instance, the economics majors assume too much knowledge on the part of the reader; they use jargon without defining terms for the non-specialist. Their papers are also too ambitious, conveying many concepts whereas a single one among the many dotting the pages of their essays would serve as an appropriate subject for a three-page paper. More than a matter of vocabulary, the overuse of jargon is a conceptual problem: Technical language, the tutors see, is a convenient shorthand for expressing complex ideas when one is writing for other specialists as the tutors themselves did when they used words like “tragedy” and “comedy” in writing about literary themes. The tutors also surmise that the economics majors are probably accustomed to using graphs and formulas to communicate information and ideas to one another, because these are prominent in most of the papers; on the other hand, most of the tutors agree that “Farmer Gray” anecdotes and stories that speak to their personal experience would make the economic analysis more accessible.

Second, each tutor is assigned a tutee and prepares a written evaluation of her paper. Tutors are asked to view the paper as a draft and to make suggestions to help the writer revise her essay. Here are some representative responses:

Cindy,

There were a couple of times when you lost me. Part of the confusion was due to my unfamiliarity with some of the jargon used by economists. For example, what is “targeting” an economy? Is it the emphasis upon some action taken by the Fed? And is it a synonym for focus?

Terry,

Paragraph 1: Because this paper is written for a naive audience, the first sentence should catch their attention and serve as an introduction to the entire paper. Since the discussion of consumer response to inflation is complex, advanced theory could be addressed in a later section of the paper. It would be helpful to elaborate on the interrelatedness of interest rates, prices, supply of goods, wages and inflation, and to describe how different factors lead to an ever-accelerating rate of inflation. The first paragraph is nonetheless well constructed, and your description of the self-perpetuating inflationary cycle as “vicious” is very effective.

Paragraph 2: President Carter’s voluntary price and wage control program is a very convincing example of how attempts of the government to

control inflation have been ineffective. Why did his attempts fail? How do decreases in the money supply affect the rate of interest? What is the relationship between interest rates and inflation? During what time period did inflation grow 14 per cent? This paragraph is your strongest, and it could be more effective as your first paragraph. It would catch the reader's attention and serve as a forceful introduction.

Susan,

Examples or anecdotes (not "Dick and Jane" types, but something relevant) would enrich your cut-and-dry explanations. Also, instead of making the paper "technical sounding," try to loosen it up. Imagine that you are describing the situation of inflation to someone who knows nothing about it.

A few terms need to be defined, especially for the layman. It seems that you assume the reader has a background in economics: p. 1, line 9: "ceiling price"; p. 2, line 6: "non-price methods" and "ration coupons"; p. 6, line 1: "rationing device."

Toby,

You did not seem to expand some of your supporting ideas enough, and I wanted to know more. I think you should ask yourself the why and how about a number of your statements. For instance, why do you say, "Inflation encourages consumers to purchase at a faster rate"?

I realize that you have chosen a problem with many facets and have tried to explain this problem in only three pages. I think you are trying to tackle too many aspects of a very complex problem without going into depth about any one of them. You have chosen a popular subject and one which is of concern to many business people and government officials, but you have not answered the question of how high interest rates will control inflation.

The tutors are also asked to introduce their written review by briefly outlining for the tutee their own profiles as writers (strengths, weaknesses, experiences) so as to put the tutee at ease and to give her a realistic picture of her tutor's abilities as a critic.

Finally the tutors attend the economics class to comment as a group on their reading of the papers. To prepare for the session, they work out their ideas about the following questions:

- How do we view peer evaluation of our papers and how can we introduce other students to this process?
- How can we demonstrate to the tutees that writing is a matter of revision and that the final drafts they submitted are really rough drafts? How can we make them see the benefits of revising?
- How should we introduce the three major criticisms that we have of their papers: their overuse of graphs and formulas to explain concepts to readers

who learn best by being presented with examples and anecdotes that speak to personal experience; their reliance upon technical language that sometimes obscures meaning; their need to limit the topic they discuss.

As the joint meeting of this English and economics class demonstrates, collaboration and experimentation are the dual theses of Goucher's initial efforts to establish a writing across the curriculum program in 1979-80. The Composing Process with its focus upon the exchange between student and student, faculty member and faculty member, students and faculty, is one of a number of tentative designs for the program. Several other experiments are also underway. Students in an introductory history class make up questions for a final exam as a way of determining the major and minor themes of the course and of actively learning how their choice of questions indicates their way of thinking about the subject. Working in groups of four, these students review a list of twenty questions, choose those they would like to answer on an exam, and revise the questions for clarity of thought and expression. Freshmen studying ethics write about a moral judgment they have made and discuss preliminary and revised drafts of their papers in small groups that include other student writers. By reversing the process—that is, by writing a personal essay on the topic before doing relevant background reading—the students are then able to do a critical reading of Plato's *Euthyphro* and to revise their personal definitions of "moral judgment" in light of their research. Instructors in two lecture classes encourage their students to write responses—evaluations, summaries, questions—to the major points of the lecture and to read their responses to the class.

If the writing across the curriculum program is to thrive at Goucher—or at any college for that matter—faculty, students, and administration must continue to welcome change and to take institutional risks. Some risks promise as yet unknown rewards through the re-definition of curriculum and of the relationship between students and faculty, faculty member and faculty member, student and student.

Martha Nochimson

WRITING INSTRUCTION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: TWO PROGRAMS

The days of discussion about whether composition is a *bonafide* college-level subject are gone. The days of agonizing about what techniques will best improve writing performance are fading too, and the latest question is whether the job must be taken on by the institution as a whole. Proponents of this approach argue that no matter what instructional methodology is employed, carryover beyond the writing courses will not occur unless the university is committed to co-operation with the writing program. At this point, attitudinal, financial, pedagogical, logistic and bureaucratic problems coalesce, as institutions work out ways to implement a program of writing across the curriculum.

There are faculty members who just don't like the idea of teaching writing, and what to do about them will become an issue when college-wide support for the writing program is sought. Faculty members committed to such support for the writing program will be skeptical about the logistics of helping students in large lecture classes with their writing. Further, some departments teach what English teachers regard as jargon; and some departments, for example, computer science, don't seem to have much use for the English language at all. What kind of accommodation can be made with departments with these differences? Finally, there is the question of faculty skills. How much does any given faculty member know about writing and how to teach it? Many are completely baffled when they read student papers. They cannot precisely name the faults nor tell their students how to revise; and they may demoralize their students by passing along their discouragement—"This is terrible," or perhaps even, "You don't belong in college." Confronted with poor student papers, a faculty member's optimism about helping students to write is likely to fade, even if the idea had once seemed promising.

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The realist tells us that the goals of university-wide cooperation are admirable but will be hard to reach, that even if we can get money and administrative cooperation, and getting those is hard enough, we will not make any real impressions on anyone. Some institutions, nevertheless, are attempting to solve the problems of college-wide support for the writing program. Accounts of these efforts do not usually conclude with the protagonists living happily ever after, but they do include successes that will transfer to other institutions.

I will write of two attempts to encourage faculty to incorporate writing instruction into their courses. The first, at the College of New Rochelle (CNR), I know intimately as I helped to design it and worked in it. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the CNR project was born out of a wish that the work in the writing program carry over into all the courses in the college. We knew that many students who were writing clearly at the end of the writing courses were not taking this skill with them to their other classes, but were acting as if clarity in writing was important only in a writing course. The grant was intended to remedy this situation by giving the writing faculty a forum for informing the rest of the faculty about the writing program. This much was clear to us; unfortunately, however, while the project was clearly organized, we did not know what changes we might reasonably expect to be made in the way non-English instructors approach bad student writing.

The grant was designed to involve all members of the faculty over a period of two years. Four two-week workshops were projected, two to be held in January during the winter semester break and two to be held after the spring semester. The workshops were administered by a director and an assistant; they also involved a minimum of four other staff members—three discussion seminar leaders from the CNR writing program and one principal speaker, Blanche Skurnick, of the City College Writing Program. The principal speaker was responsible for each morning's lecture to all participants which culminated in a question and answer session. The discussion section leaders were responsible for the afternoon. After lunch, the participants met in small groups for extended discussion about the material presented in the morning and for projects relevant to the morning lecture.

There were twenty participants scheduled for each of the four workshops; the budget included stipends of \$500.00 for each participant, as well as substantial salaries for the discussion leaders, administrators and principal speaker. Funds were also provided for books, Xeroxing, secretarial aid, and lunch.

Each participant in the workshop received a schedule during the first meeting. The days were planned so that by the end of the two weeks the

workshop participants had had a short course in teaching writing. We began with a general lecture which presented the thesis of the workshop: Most teachers think of writing only as a product, but writing teachers, and any instructor interested in giving writing guidance to students, must be concerned with the process of writing and must be prepared to intervene in the process as well as to discuss the quality of the end product. It was a somewhat eclectic thesis as we were not excluding either product or process, but we did maintain that knowledge about the process of writing is important and relatively mysterious to teachers both in and out of the writing program.

For use in the afternoon discussion groups, we distributed student and professional essays. These provided material for examining both general and specific problems in student writing. The professional essays, taken from standard anthologies, were included for two reasons. First, we wanted to impress on the participants what kinds of materials were available for the students to read, what their models were. Second, we wanted to impress on the participants that if they expected writing of this caliber, or better, they were really holding students up to professional standards. Many of the participants realized that they did indeed expect their students to live up to the example of E.M. Forster's "My Wood."

Furthermore, when we examined the professional writing according to the standards that we asked of our students, even on the most elementary, truly basic level, some of the professional writing did not measure up. We looked at each essay to see whether it had a thesis statement or even a thesis, and some of them did not. One essay, "The Population Bomb and How to Defuse it," by Jean Libman Block, reprinted from *Good Housekeeping in Steps in Composition*, a widely-used writing text, is full of unsubstantiated generalizations. There is no clear thread of argumentation. In fact the article—I cannot in good conscience call it an essay—is a potpourri of cataloguing ineffectively the methods of population control, ranking them with very little thought or discussion, and indicating that if we don't employ them, disaster is imminent. There is no documentation for this claim. If a student ever presented such a whirligig of claims to a writing teacher, he would receive an F. But the writer of this article was paid for her work, and anthologized in a writing text, surely more for the interest of the subject than for the quality of writing.

This gave the faculty participants something to ponder. And they felt less inclined to look with scorn on their students in retrospect. "The Population Bomb" was not the only disappointing professional essay. Perhaps, our participants began to think, they had been expecting not only professional standards, but the highest professional standards.

The student essays were drawn from a pool accumulated by the CNR faculty. In the September preceding the first workshop, we put out a call for

faculty to xerox student papers and essays at our expense. They were cooperative, and we had samples from all the disciplines.

We used student essays on the first day to try to make workshop participants sensitive to the kinds of writing strengths that CNR students typically exhibit, as well as to their common problems. Distracted by awkward wording and poor spelling, instructors may fail to notice that a paper has a thesis statement, well-formed paragraphs, and an appropriate rhetorical strategy. We certainly did not presume to tell our participants that this sort of essay was well written. We wanted to discuss other distinctions so that participants' comments to their students would not be misleading. To call an ungraceful, but coherent paper "badly written," we pointed out, was too general a criticism to be useful. If the teacher could explicitly comment on the structural achievement of a coherent paper and distinguish the problems in it as stylistic and mechanical, the student would be in a better position to know what revisions were called for. This was another shock, and we needed to reiterate early and often that we did not mean that bad spelling was good writing, only that there were other considerations that could be named and were more important.

We also used the student essays to address the problem that faculty outside the writing program seemed reluctant, to say the least, to allow poor writing in a student paper to affect the grade. This, we told our faculty associates, undercuts the college's writing program and development of student writing ability. Colleagues told us that there was no sense in bothering the students about those details since so few of them know how to write and since the non-writing faculty could understand the papers and essays anyway. We insisted that there was no difference between clarity of form and content, and they chuckled at us, poor, deluded English types. But they *could* see that they did not understand the badly written student papers that we showed them and were reduced to interpreting what the student "must have meant." We used these moments to emphasize that lack of control in the writing obscured the content. Then why did they understand their own students? We said they didn't. We suggested that they appeared to understand their own students because they were immersed in the material they were reading and automatically inferred what a writer presumably "meant," without requiring sufficient documentation or coherent presentation. We pointed out that depending on the reader's active and accurate intuitions is one of the major pitfalls against which students are warned in writing classes. Teachers were surprised by the suggestion that they had unconsciously filled in the gaps left in student papers.

In addition to discussing teacher attitudes, we also discussed the teaching of grammar, usage, the selection and availability of writing texts, rules of organization, research, and modes of commenting on, or correcting a

student paper. The research unit included a discussion of plagiarism; the unit on usage included a section on jargon. For several of these units, the participants were asked to prepare at home some work to be discussed in the seminars.

Most of the material we presented is already familiar to writing teachers; but because some of the topics were presented in an unusual way or were received with special enthusiasm, I will mention them more specifically. The sentence combining exercises were the most fun; the jargon homework was the most fraught with danger; the plagiarism homework provoked the most thought.

The sentence-combining exercises, taken from William Strong's *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book* (NY: Random House, 1973), sparked off all those qualities that make people teachers: imagination, the rage for order, the urge to excel. Faculty members outdid themselves and tried to outdo each other in making the longest and best combinations. These exercises accomplished two purposes. First, of course, they made the faculty more conscious of grammar skills. Second, they gave the participants a sense of fun about grammar. However, since many of the faculty either were sure that they did not want to teach writing or did not know whether they wanted to, exactly how the benefits from these exercises would be channeled to the students was unclear.

The jargon homework required participants to bring in two passages from learned journals in their fields, one that they considered well written, and one that they believed contained jargon. In connection with this homework, participants read George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language." In preparing this unit of the workshop we were aware of the danger that jargon might be spotted in some favorite essay, causing friction and worse; but this did not happen.

The plagiarism exercises were designed by Dr. Barbara McManus, Chairman of the CNR Classics Department. (See Appendix A.) They required participants to examine several different paraphrases of a quotation and decide which were plagiarisms, to examine an example of plagiarism in professional writing, to practice paraphrasing, and to design a paraphrasing exercise using readings from their own disciplines. The faculty was generally impressed at how hard it is to paraphrase legitimately and were less inclined, as a result, to abominate plagiarisms that were the result of inexperience rather than dishonesty.

Several evaluation procedures were built into this project. The participants filled out questionnaires. Discussion leaders submitted reports at the end of each workshop. The directors wrote an interim and a final report. In addition, writing samples were taken from classes of all participants in the workshops who went on to teach writing.

Other institutions can replicate some of the benefits of the workshops. The participants' responses varied in style, but they were all impressed at what hard work it is to teach writing. This realization meant one tremendous and significant advance; it reduced the hostility other departments had felt toward the writing program. They had previously suspected that bad student writing was the result of incompetence and irresponsibility in the writing faculty.

The participants, in general, became aware of their own prejudices about writing. Some teachers began to see that it was prejudice that prevented them from seeing any value in a paper if the spelling was poor. Among these, some wanted to get past this kind of intense emphasis; others were not sure.

The participants were pleased to have learned the terminology of the writing program. Many had never heard terms like "thesis sentence" and "topic sentence." They felt that they were now in a position to name problems that they had simply experienced globally as "bad writing." They also believed that they now were better able to talk about grammar and felt gratified to have learned of several texts.

During the sessions, we discussed a number of ways that already busy instructors could integrate a follow-up on the college writing course into a junior course, in modern art, for example. Several of the solutions that we discussed seemed promising to workshop participants. One idea was for teachers to assign papers which explicitly recall the modes of organization in the basic writing course, such as comparison and contrast, definition, and classification, so that students recalling these modes of organization would then be prone to see their general usefulness. Another idea was to assign three short papers which build on each other. For example, in a course on modern art, one might assign a paper about a specific figure. The second paper assigned might be to contrast and compare the figure considered in the first paper with a second figure. The third might involve a classification project in which the first two figures were involved. This means that the student can incorporate responses to the two papers into the third, in likeness of the rewriting process. Cumulative papers seemed especially attractive to teachers with large classes who felt that their comments on written work were futile for they simply could not cope with requiring revisions of so many separate papers.

We who were running the workshop felt that we had gleaned information too. As we presented our material, we learned about style manuals and conventions of other disciplines, especially the sciences. We brought out into the open the places in which academic styles differed. Far from despairing, we agreed that now that we knew about the differences, we would be better equipped to help our students. We would be able to warn

biology students, for example, that what we were teaching did not apply in the particular situation which the biology department had outlined for us. They had their own style for citation of sources. We believed that, armed with this knowledge, we would increase our credibility with the students, as they would not find themselves reproved in other courses for doing what we writing instructors had told them to do.

Rapport between the faculty members and between faculty and the writing program was much improved by these workshops. Unfortunately, this change was much greater than the change in student writing. This was true, in great measure, not because the workshop itself was ineffectual, but because the goals of this project were fuzzy; the step after the workshop had not been delineated.

It was not clear whether teachers entering this workshop were to emerge from it to teach writing or simply to be more informed about the writing program. When faculty members were first approached with the idea of the workshops, some resisted, fearing that the administration would coerce them into teaching writing once they “knew how.” This was especially true of teachers in the humanities and foreign languages who had tenure and/or full-time contracts and whose enrollments had sharply dropped because of the stampede for vocationally geared courses. The administration had to guarantee that no faculty member would be coerced to fill the four course obligation with writing courses, regardless of circumstances. This guarantee dissipated the reluctance of some faculty to volunteer for the workshops.

The extent to which the lessons of the workshop became a part of teacher practice, then, was a matter of the faculty’s good will and adaptability. It is difficult to integrate new concepts into a course design; and like all of us, the CNR faculty works extremely hard without taking on new obligations. There were sporadic reports of actual implementation of the program’s suggestions, but that was all. Although the CNR faculty workshop taught the participants a great deal, what came out of it clearly did not reach the students undiluted. Certainly the administration was wise to promise not to make the workshop a means of “punishing” teachers for failing to subscribe the requisite students.

At Drew University, faculty participate in a series of workshops similar to those at CNR and then teach a freshman course in which they combine writing instruction with instruction in their own academic disciplines. A grant from the Mellon Foundation provides funds for this program. Over a three year period, all the Drew faculty will attend a three week summer workshop covering writing, speech, and guidance, the writing part taught by Drew’s Jacqueline Berke, author of *Twenty Questions for the Writer*. The faculty participants are paid \$1,200 for attending. Then, having completed

the workshop, the Drew faculty member is ready to be part of a university-wide writing program which faculty do not perceive to be punitive.

Briefly, Drew has organized its freshman year so that along with the regular English Department writing course, the student takes a freshman seminar, restricted to 14 students, taught by a faculty member who has participated in the workshop. The instructor also serves as the student's academic advisor. Students choose a seminar from a large list of seminar topics prepared by the participating faculty. The wide range of topics and interests permits almost all students to be placed either in their first or second choice of seminar.

These seminars are the courses that each instructor has always wanted to teach, but which he has not been able to offer—either because they lie outside his discipline, adopt a cross-disciplinary approach, or would not, in ordinary circumstances, be economically feasible. Thus, for the instructors, the seminars revive the good old days when electives did not depend on registration.

Teachers will not teach their seminars, however, indifferent to the writing of the students. All grammar and organizational errors lower the grade no matter how much detail is packed in, and there are about eight papers a semester. No student is exempted from the seminar, even though all students who score over 570 on the College Boards are exempted from the parallel English Department course.

The combination of the English Department course and the freshman seminar has provided many benefits for Drew. First, the advising system has improved tremendously, because the advisor and all his advisees meet weekly and establish a relationship that enables the advisor to give meaningful academic guidance. Second, faculty morale and *esprit de corps* is very high. As at CNR, barriers between departments are broken in the workshops. The faculty are also able to pursue teaching interests they could not have considered under the earlier system. Most spectacular and cheering, student writing has significantly improved. From comparing the writing samples of Drew students who took writing after the freshman seminar was instituted to student samples before the program, it is clear that there has been a significant change for the better. What is even more interesting is that students who were not exempt from the English Department parallel course and therefore took both the seminar and the writing program scored higher on some of the control tests than the students who came in with higher College Board scores and supposedly better skills and therefore placed out of the English Department course. The program clearly includes, from a faculty point of view, adequate financial compensation, rewards to the student, and intellectual excitement. From the student point of view the program results in better

advisement and better writing. There are of course some problems, but Drew seems to have benefitted in the essential areas of faculty attitude and the improvement in student writing.

New Rochelle and Drew, therefore, present models of ventures in writing across the curriculum. Both involve courage, foresight, imaginative planning, and funding. The latter is, of course, the component most difficult to replicate for other colleges and universities that would like to take something of value from these models.

We cannot underestimate the complexity of attempting writing across the curriculum without funding but, alternatively, I do not wish to suggest that without funding the attempt is ill-advised. Let us then consider two discrete questions, the likelihood of obtaining funds and what measures may be taken if funding is either too far in the future or unavailable.

If we are to take the warnings of George Orwell to heart, it would seem that the government ought to budget money for retraining writers in every institution in the country as a matter of national security. For now, however, we writing teachers must rely on sporadically available funds of foundations like Mellon and government institutions like NEH. Although one cannot predict never-fail formulas for tapping these funds, several points seem worth making.

First of all, the planning and writing of the proposal must be clear, detailed, and precise, including the administrative and teaching staff, their names and dossiers, if possible. The proposal should include a fully articulated budget and timetable demonstrating the percentage of the faculty to be retrained, and how the specified time is necessary for reaching this significant number. Evaluation procedures measuring such things as the response of faculty members to the program and the subsequent achievement of students must be spelled out. Finally, it is helpful to research the inclination of the funding source in advance, whether it is interested only in projects that have never been tried or interested in helping institutions, even if by tried and true methods.

We should not imagine that implementing writing across the curriculum can be approached equally well with and without funding, but we should not fail to attempt broader institutional involvement in any event. Because real education demands the ability to write, the stakes are too high not to.

Several possibilities for colleges and universities without special training grants come to mind. One or two day conferences paid for from faculty development funds may be possible to start the ball rolling. Follow up might be administered on the initiative of the faculty senate or equivalent body, or by the individual departments. This is to say, after a formal, but brief, workshop dedicated to discussing writing across the curriculum, the faculty senate might organize short term interdepartmental cooperation.

For example, during a particular semester the English Department and the History Department might coordinate a particular history class with a particular writing class. During the chosen semester, all assignments in the history class would be given to the writing teacher in advance and used pedagogically in the writing class. Possibly such arrangements might not be made by an all-college body, but by the individual departments themselves.

In such less comprehensive programs, the major task of the one or two day conference must be to create a climate that will foster active interest in interdepartmental cooperation for improving student writing. There is hardly time in one day to teach non-English faculty to discuss writing with their students. Perhaps most success is possible if the course projected by these one day conferences is one in which non-English faculty will not be required either to supervise student writing, or to change in any way their usual plans for the semester. Departments can cooperate with the writing program by making good writing a fundamental part of the course grade; and writing teachers can cooperate by discussing the mechanics and organization of papers assigned in other courses.

Alternatively, funding for a wider retraining like the workshops at the College of New Rochelle and Drew might come from already existing funds. Teachers might take a semester course in teaching writing as part of their semester work load in lieu of teaching one course. Still another idea for small colleges might be to set up a consortium to pool their faculty development funds for the purpose of mutual retraining. Large colleges may have access to special intra-college funds, or might consider asking the student government to help underwrite faculty retraining with some portion of the student activities budget.

The possibilities for involving an entire institution with teaching writing are many, but the problems are also numerous; we face error, not only in linguistic and intellectual disarray, but also in professional and financial turmoil. Big, daring measures seem to be in order. Let us, by all means, seek comprehensive, and therefore expensive, solutions to our problems. Nevertheless, if we lack the grand scale, let us continue to use the tools of the trade: imagination and intelligence. We can and we should involve the entire institution in what, after all, is our common goal: the creation of a literate, educated graduate.

APPENDIX : Plagiarism Exercises

1. Here is a passage from Walter Allen's *The English Novel* (New York: Dutton, 1954), p.223.

"*Wuthering Heights* is the most remarkable novel in English. It is perfect, and perfect in the rarest way: it is the complete bodying forth of an intensely individual apprehension of the nature of man and life. That is to say, the content is strange enough, indeed baffling enough, while the artistic expression of it is flawless."

Which of the following passages constitute plagiarism and why?

a. The most remarkable novel in English is *Wuthering Heights*. It brings forth an individual apprehension of the nature of man and life; therefore it is perfect in the rarest way. The artistic expression is flawless, but the content is strange, indeed baffling.

b. *Wuthering Heights* is a great English novel. It is perfect in the rarest way: it provides an individual apprehension of man's nature. The artistic expression is flawless, although the content is strange and baffling.¹

c. Walter Allen insists upon the extraordinary quality of *Wuthering Heights*. In this novel, he maintains, Emily Bronte makes an extremely personal comment on the human situation by employing an impeccable novelistic framework to present her strange and mysterious characters and plot¹.

¹Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (New York: Dutton, 1954), p. 223.

2. Analyze the ways in which the second quotation makes use of the first without acknowledgement. If you were Varma, how would you make use of Summers' main point without extensive direct quotation and without plagiarism?

a. "In by far the greatest number of their works it would be true to say that the protagonist is neither the plaintive and persecuted heroine, Elmira, Rosaline, Matilda; nor the handsome and gallant hero, Theodore, Constantine, Rosalvo; nor the desperate and murderous villain Montoni, Wolfran, Condemar; nor even the darkly scowling and mysterious monk, Father Heriome, Abbot Benneditto, Theodosius de Zulvin; but rather the remote and ruined castle with its antique courts, deserted chambers, pictured windows that exclude the light, haunted galleries amid whose mouldering gloom is heard the rustle of an unseen robe, a sigh, a hurried footfall where no mortal step should tread; the ancient manor, hidden away in the heart of a pathless forest, a home of memories of days long gone before when bright eyes glanced from the casement and balcony over the rich domain, the huge-

girthed oaks, the avenues and far-stretching vistas, the cool stream winding past the grassy lawns, but now tenanted only by a silver-headed retainer and his palsied dame; the huge fortress set high upon some spar of the Apenines, dark machicolated battlements and sullen towers which frown o'er the valleys below, a lair of masterless men, through whose dim corridors prowl armed bandits, whose halls ring with hideous revelry or anon are silent as the grave. . . ." —Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest* (New York: Russell, 1938), pp. 191-192.

b. "The background of Walpole's story is a Gothic castle, singularly unenchanted, but capable of being invested with mysterious grandeur as later in the novels of Ann Radcliffe. The Castle has been called the true hero of the book, the hub around which all action gravitates. The remote castle, with its antique courts and ruined turrets, deserted and haunted chambers where hang age-old tapestries; its grated windows that exclude the light; its dark, eerie galleries amid whose mouldering gloom is heard the rustle of an unseen robe, a sigh, a hurried footfall where no mortal step should tread; its dark machicolated and sullen towers set high upon some precipice of the Apenines frowning upon the valleys below—it is the castle itself which is the focal point of Walpole's romance." —Devendra Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London: Arthur Barker, 1957), p. 57.

3. If you were writing a paper upon a suitable topic, how would you make use of each of the following passages? Where would you quote and where paraphrase? What factual material could be used without footnoting? Practice reading each selection to abstract the main point made by the author; practice paraphrasing these points.

a. "It is true that, since the end of the Second World War, there have been a number of local wars. But it is also true that, during those 20 years, there has been no war between any of the three super-powers, no world war, and no war in which the atomic weapon has been used. The reason surely is that the significance of this invention has been recognized, and this has led the governments and the peoples, since then, to keep their warfare within bounds, even though it has not deterred them from going on playing the very dangerous game of making war within these limits. If war were man's normal condition, the normal sequel to the Second World War would have been for the United States and Russia to go to war with each other, and for China then to go to war with the survivor, if there was one.

Roman history gives us a longer view than our own generation gives. The Romans closed the doors of the temple of the god Janus when Rome was at peace, and those doors are recorded only once to have been closed (and then for only a year or two) before they were closed in the reign of Augustus. Thus

the pre-Augustan chapter of Roman history might seem to be evidence that war is the normal condition of man.

The next chapter, however, is evidence to the contrary. Augustus established peace throughout the Mediterranean world, and the Augustan peace was preserved for a quarter of a millennium. Within that period there were, of course, one or two short civil wars over the succession to the imperial throne; there were one or two minor wars with the Parthian Empire, which was Rome's only civilized nextdoor neighbor, and there was intermittent police action against the barbarians beyond the Roman Empire's frontiers. All the same, this was on the whole an age of peace for the western end of the Old World. The years 31 B.C.-235 A.D. stand out, in this respect, in sharp contrast to the preceding millennia. Those 265 years of peace prove that, after all, war is not the normal condition of man in that part of the world." — Arnold Toynbee, "War is Not the Normal Condition of Man," *Tradition and Dissent: A Rhetoric/Reader*, Florence Greenberg and Anne Heffley, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 476-477.

b. "What we really see in the modern film of serious intent is, almost always, a bedroom sequence worked into a plot in order to assure that the film will be able to compete commercially with films that include such sequences for purely sensational reasons. Such a sequence, when it concerns main characters, cannot be detached from the narrative, regardless of the degree of its relevance. If, for instance, a harassed filmmaker wanted to include such a sequence only for the commercial value his producer thought it would have, he could not dispose of it in the form of a digression. In other words, he cannot decide to spend five minutes or even three minutes with his main characters running about undressed and hope that as a deliberate and obvious digression it will not affect the rest of the film.

For the sake of comparison, consider the deliberate digressions that were implanted in the Marx Brothers films. Today, those obligatory scenes in which Harpo and Chico play their instruments are annoying flaws; the films stop dead for a few minutes while comedy and the plot are suspended for solo performances. We are bored, but the film does not irretrievably flounder, for the sequence, once past, is forgotten as the Brothers roll merrily through the rest of the film. If the sexual encounter could be handled the same way, it would create only a small artistic problem. However, the casual treatment of sex is improbable, since sex implies either the development of a passion or a calculated use of another person—and both alternatives incorporate meaningful human motivations. For every bedroom encounter, sequences leading up to and away from it must be made part of the film. In fact, a filmmaker cannot make a believable bedroom sequence irrelevant because it shapes our awareness of the characters; it sometimes tells us more about them

than is intended for the artistic integrity of the work. As a clichéd attribute of modernism, the persistent use of sexuality in film after film results in a emphasis on characterization beyond every other aspect of the film—and an insistence that every film do the same thing (i.e., stress personality). Constructing a story so that it will contain a bedroom sequence narrowly restricts the film idea.” —Stanley Solomon, *The Film Idea* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972) pp. 245-246.

c. “We are now in a position to spell out the essential fable of Natty’s celebrated friendship with Chingachgook, the “Big Serpent” (so called, as Natty never tires of explaining, after ‘a sartain serpent at the creation of the ‘arth that outwitted the first woman’). The American Adam knows intuitively how to avoid the error of his archetypal ancestor; he can only hope to retain possession of his American Eden if he makes a pact with the devil and they jointly exclude women from the virgin forest. ‘Where is the man to turn this beautiful place into. . . a garden of Eden for us?’ Judith Hutter demands of her sister Hetty. The harsh answer is given throughout the *Leatherstocking Tales*: the American Eden (to paraphrase Melville) is a Paradise for bachelors only. —Joel Porte, *The Romance in America* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 28.

Anita Brostoff
Barry K. Beyer

AN APPROACH TO INTEGRATING WRITING INTO A HISTORY COURSE

Beginning college-level writers are, generally, beginning students across the curriculum. They have as little experience with history or biology, as disciplines, as with writing. Thus it may seem unreasonable to ask subject matter teachers to deal with these students' writing on top of teaching them discipline-based knowledge and skills. Subject matter teachers may resist facing papers full of mechanical errors and unsupported generalizations. They may feel they don't know how to teach their students to write, especially when writing teachers themselves often complain they don't know where or whether to begin. It's no wonder so many basic college courses require no papers and give only objective or short-answer tests.

But while it is understandable for subject matter teachers to back off from the teaching of writing in their courses, it is not wise. Teaching writing across the curriculum has won considerable support throughout higher education on the strength of arguments about the relationship between writing and learning content, and about the relationship between writing and conceptual and analytical thinking. There is no need to detail these arguments here. The point is that if they are true for advanced students, they are surely true for beginning students. Therefore, as more and more subject matter and writing instructors come to agree about the value of writing in subject courses, it is important that they work together to create models that teach content and writing together.

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This paper describes one such model developed by two faculty members, one in writing and one in history, who designed, taught, and evaluated a history course in which writing played a central role.¹ We taught the course, a survey of African history, at a private university where there are few if any basic writers, where most of those who enrolled in the course were a little beyond the basics in writing but were almost completely uninformed in African history.

RATIONALE AND GOALS

On the basis of our past experience both in introductory history courses and with beginning writers, we identified four problem areas beginning college writers have in content courses. The first of these involves attitudes toward writing in subject matter courses. The other three are essential thinking and writing competencies: analysis of information and conceptualization of ideas, analysis of frames of reference, and effective structure in writing. Our perception of these difficulties shaped our goals and the techniques we devised to integrate writing and subject matter learning in this course.

We had several goals connected with writing. First, we sought to find transferable techniques for integrating instruction in writing with instruction in subject matter in undergraduate courses. This goal was based on the rationale that writing about subject matter enhances the learning of the subject matter and simultaneously improves writing.² Second, and more specifically, we wanted to find methods and materials by which students could develop conceptual and analytical thinking through writing.³ This goal and our methods were based on the premise that while most beginning college level writers have the ability to conceptualize and analyze, they have done so in styles of thinking we would not consider analytic. What they need, as Mina Shaughnessy noted, is conscious awareness of these skills, and instruction and practice in the styles of thinking and ordering used in academic discourse.⁴ Finally, we wanted to

¹This history and writing course was self-paced. However, we have chosen not to discuss this aspect of the course in order to avoid confusing the elements of self-paced instruction with writing instruction in general.

²A discussion of the relationship between writing and learning subject matter appears in A.D. Van Nostrand, "Writing and the Dialogue of Disciplines," ed. J. Gilmour Sherman et al., *Personalized Instruction in Education Today* (San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1978), pp. 17-21.

³A discussion of the relationship between writing and thinking appears in Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *College Composition and Communication*, XXVIII: 2 (May 1977), pp. 122-133.

⁴Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 226-274.

identify and teach to key difficulties which we believe beginning writers face in content courses such as history: analyzing and hypothesizing about data; analyzing others' points of view; and structuring expositions of complex questions. To help overcome these difficulties, we sought to engage students in writing about subject matter by providing writing tasks with realistic rhetorical situations.

For the writing component of the course, we selected and adapted key concepts of the Functional Writing model developed by A.D. Van-
Nostrand and his colleagues⁵ and devised some additional instructional techniques. We presented writing instruction in units spaced evenly throughout the course, making instruction sequential and cumulative—i.e., each unit built upon and continued to use what was learned in previous units. The five units of writing instruction were all based on the rationale that the essence of both thinking and writing is making relationships. Each unit focused on a different skill: making inferences; analyzing an author's frame of reference; accommodating readers; planning an extended written statement; and writing coherently.

In order to make each of these five thinking-writing skills manageable for our students, we presented each one by the same step-by-step procedure, using as content the topic then being studied. In each instance we explained the operations that constituted the skill and provided an example of applying the skill, using course content. Then students applied and practiced the skill while incorporating additional course information. Finally, students received feedback in individual conferences which provided formative evaluation of their degree of mastery of the skill and of the substance. Frequently students used this feedback to revise their writing. For two of the writing units we provided supplemental self-instructional materials. After completing each unit, students needing additional practice used these materials to continue to develop the specific skill. In general the supplemental materials used course content so that students maintained their progress through the course.

In other words, we wanted to make writing an integral part of the *history* course—i.e., we wanted to use writing to advance the study of content. Therefore, we used writing in place of such verbal activities as discussions or oral reports, making writing serve similar functions. Also, we used writing to help students approach course content in various ways. Upon beginning a new topic, students gathered introductory data in order to generate a broad hypothesis, which they could then test against detailed study of that topic. In the midst of studying a topic, students wrote to

⁵A.D. Van Nostrand et al., *Functional Writing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978).

analyze data in depth. A third kind of writing activity helped students synthesize, extend, and evaluate their study of a topic.

We pursued these goals of learning the subject matter and improving writing and thinking simultaneously. The methods we used to approach the four specific problem areas we identified, and our general goal of integrating instruction in history and writing, are described below.

STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

Unfortunately, few students see history or other discipline-based courses as a place where they should be required to write or where the quality of their writing matters. When they have written in such courses in the past, it was usually in a testing situation; they wrote to show what they knew. Since many beginning college students have poor self images as writers, they feel put upon when writing quality suddenly “counts.” And since writing may be a difficult and unpleasant task for them, they may feel overburdened when confronted with instruction in writing as well as instruction in subject matter. Two undesirable attitudes toward a content/writing course may result: a shrugged shoulders attitude toward writing—“it simply doesn’t matter and isn’t worth the fuss”—or a resentment toward the writing and toward the course which sometimes erupts in open resistance to learning.

We attempted to deal with these attitudes in several ways—partly by spacing writing throughout the course, but primarily by explaining in advance the importance of this element of our course. First, we told the students at the initial class meeting that the course involved instruction in writing as well as in history, and we explained how writing about a subject helps writers learn facts and develop insights into that subject they might not otherwise develop. Second, at that same class meeting, we gave a writing pretest; we asked the students to write a paragraph describing their perceptions of Africa south of the Sahara. Finally, throughout the course we continually explained our emphasis on writing, by specifying in each unit where writing occurred the writing goal as well as the subject matter goals. By means of these explanations we intended both to allay objections to writing in our history course and to encourage students to care about the quality of their writing in the course.

FORMING CONCEPTS FROM DATA

In thinking and writing about unfamiliar subject matter, most beginning students seem to lack conscious, systematic strategies for inventing or inferring something significant to write about.⁶ When they are assigned a

⁶Shaughnessy, *passim*.

topic—or worse yet, a choice of topics—they have trouble knowing where or how to begin. When they are given an array of information on a topic, they have difficulty finding a focus, or at least a narrow enough topic to write about meaningfully. They need strategies for selecting important information, inferring a relationship among that information, and asserting that relationship.

The first unit containing writing instruction focuses on these three tasks. The strategy presented consists of a series of recursive steps designed to teach the general skill of conceptualization. In addition, the strategy teaches specifically the skill, necessary in history, of testing information and inferences about that information against each other, in order to weigh possibly conflicting evidence and make the inferences as accurate as possible. Another goal of this unit is to show that more than one inference can be made about any set of information, that there can be many “right” answers, that interpretations of history are complex and open-ended.

The format by which we presented instruction in skills of conceptualization begins with this task:

Given:

1) Topic: **Africa Today**

Collecting information:

2) List below 6-7 pieces of information about Africa that you find in the newspaper excerpts and in the chart included in this unit. Two sample items are already here to help you start your list.

—new mineral resources found in some nations

—changing prices for copper hurt Zambia’s budget

Finding a common relationship and writing an organizing idea:

3) Write a sentence that summarizes (organizes) all the information listed above (or almost all). This assertion should not catalogue or list all this information, but rather should state a way in which these pieces of information are connected to each other.

Using your organizing idea as the basis for a paragraph:

4) Write a paragraph that uses at least 4 of the pieces of information from your list to explain, justify or prove the assertion written in #3. Use this assertion as an idea around which to organize your paragraph—i.e., make it serve as an organizing idea. As you include each piece of information, be sure you also connect it to the organizing idea.

Writing a revised, developed organizing idea:

5) Finally, write a sentence that summarizes the significance of the paragraph you have just completed about Africa today. This sentence should not merely be a restatement of the assertion written in #3 above, but should go beyond that sentence to clarify and/or expand what you said in the paragraph.

As students go through these steps, they consciously practice certain key skills: In selecting information from reading, they must decide what is important and must separate relevant from irrelevant information; in making an inference, they must find a theme in a set of information; in writing a paragraph, they must show how the chosen information relates to the inference they use as an organizing idea.

When they have completed this part of the unit, students go on to test their inference, or hypothesis, against more detailed study of the topic. They are presented with additional information; they test their revised organizing idea and this new information against each other reciprocally; then they write another paragraph. The format for this task is as follows:

1) Write your revised organizing idea here:

2) List below the new information for this unit that:

A. Supports the organizing idea

B. Contradicts (refutes) the organizing idea

3) List below three or four new ideas you get about Africa today from the information you have just studied. Cite evidence from this information to support each idea:

New Ideas About Africa Today

Supporting Evidence

4) Reexamine the sentence you wrote in item #1 above. If you wish, rephrase this sentence in order to clarify it or rewrite this sentence in order to modify it. This new sentence should take into account the evidence and new ideas you have found in this assignment.

5) Write a paragraph that uses some of the relevant evidence above to explain, justify, or prove the assertion you wrote in #4.

Working with data on “Africa Today” in these two activities, most students form the concept that “change” is an important trait of Africa today. With changes occurring in all phases of life—political, social, and economic—the greatest writing problem is to focus in further, to a set of information and ideas manageable in a paragraph. Here is one student’s solution to this problem:

Africa the continent as well as the nation is going through a period in which many events are taking place because of change. Medical technology has changed the methods for treating illnesses and because of this African’s life expectation has increased as well as the life expectancy of his cattle. The increasing population has also affected Africa because there are now more and more cities being built. This has had the effects, on some Africans, of changing their expectations in life. Black Africans now want large homes and cars. This has caused an increase in the interest of education thus now more of the African nations are putting large parts of their revenues into education. Change has caused series of events to take place.

In this paragraph we can see the writer’s struggle to choose information—the reference to cattle, for example, certainly seems out of place. But with all the awkwardness, we can see also the gradual emergence of an idea: the progression from increased life expectancy to increased population to changes in life styles and goals has about it an air of logical thinking and an air of conceptual discovery.

Students who had difficulty with this unit used the supplementary materials designed to give further help with the formulation of organizing ideas. These exercises ask students to distinguish between given valid and not-so-valid organizing ideas for a set of information and ask them to state more than one organizing idea for a given set of information, thus making the point that several valid organizing ideas are possible.

Throughout this unit, the recursive interplay between information and inference replicates the recursive nature of the writing and thinking processes. At the same time, what the students write becomes a purposeful probe of subject matter.

ANALYZING OTHERS’ FRAMES OF REFERENCE: ASSESSING WRITER BIAS AND ACCOMMODATING READERS

While awareness of others’ points of view is of primary importance in all writing, assessment takes on particular importance in the discipline of history and, indeed, in the other social sciences. Students need to be able to assess bias in what they read, see, or hear as well as to accommodate their readers’ points of view in order to persuade their audience when they write. The concept of frame of reference helps students become aware of how

people's basic perceptions—attitudes, assumptions, and expectations—condition their choice of what to report, how to interpret information, and what to believe. By manipulating frame of reference in writing, students become conscious of the concept and make it a part of their analytical resources as writers and as students of history. Thus they can become not only better consumers of messages produced by others, but also better producers of their own written messages. We presented the concept of frame of reference in two units, the first focusing on evaluating bias as one reads, and the second focusing on evaluating and using the readers' frames of reference as one writes.

The unit on assessing an author's bias involves several skills. Students need to acquire sensitivity to connotations of words in order to see how the words supply clues to bias. They need to learn to spot assumptions underlying a stated or implied idea. They must be alert to what is left unreported as well as what is reported by an author. They must be able to distinguish evidence from hypotheses about evidence and statements of proveable fact from statements of opinion or value judgements. In sum, they must develop the conscious habit of evaluating where a writer is "coming from," in order to understand clearly and evaluate fully what the writer is saying.

The unit introduces the concept of frame of reference by presenting two opposing statements dealing with the question, "Does Africa have a history?" and by eliciting the idea that opposing answers to this question rest on different definitions of "history" and different assumptions about Africa. Hugh Trevor-Roper, with a bias toward the European past, defines history as "purposive movement toward a pre-conceived goal" and concludes about Africa that "There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. . . The rest is largely darkness."⁷ Leon Clark, with a broader frame of reference, defines history as the record, derived from oral tradition and archeology as well as written documents, of a people's past. Judging a people's history on its own terms and not according to the criteria of outsiders, he concludes that Africa has a rich and significant history.⁸ Students analyze the different frames of reference implicit in these statements and examine how and why Trevor-Roper and Clark select different facts to arrive at their different opinions.

⁷Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 9.

⁸Leon E. Clark, ed., *Through African Eyes: The African Past* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 3-7.

Next students write to learn more about frame of reference and about Africa's past. They gather more information on Africa's past through a slide-tape and readings; select a narrowed topic about Africa's past, such as trade, Arabian influence, or African nations and states; and select and list information on that topic. They write a description of Trevor-Roper's frame of reference and state an organizing idea that comes out of his frame of reference and that relates their list of information. Then they write a paragraph using this information to support their organizing idea, with the goal of convincing a reader as Trevor-Roper would. Finally, they write a sentence that expresses more precisely than the original organizing idea what the paragraph actually says. Then they repeat this same task, taking on Leon Clark's frame of reference.

As writing teachers know, getting out of one's own head and into another's, a difficult job for all writers, is especially hard for beginners, who tend to exhibit considerable egocentrism—i.e., they may not realize that others have different points of view from their own, let alone be able to see things from others' points of view. For students who had difficulty understanding the concept and identifying and taking on another's frame of reference in the unit described above, we provided a supplemental writing unit which breaks the strategy down into smaller steps. This activity asks students to arrange a list of 15-20 words (names of countries) into groups and then to write a label or title that expresses what the words in each group have in common. Next, the students arrange the same words in different groups and label each new group. In the next step, they examine two given groupings of these same words, one grouping by number of letters in the words and one grouping by number of syllables in the words. Finally, they identify a way of thinking or frame of reference that might inspire this way of grouping and identify the frame of reference or way of thinking that inspired their own groupings. (See Appendix A.) The supplemental material in this unit also gives students additional practice in identifying an author's frame of reference. It leads them through the process by asking them to identify those words, facts, and ideas in a text that help a reader detect the author's frame of reference.

By writing and rewriting about course content from different points of view, students generate insights not only into the subject matter but also into those who have participated in the making of this subject matter—in this case, Europeans, Arabs, and Africans of times past and present. In a sense, this ability to see the possibility of opposing—and perhaps equally “valid”—points of view is what historical mindedness is all about. And this is important, because developing a sense of historical mindedness is an important goal of introductory history teaching.

We next turned the frame of reference problem the other way, asking students to write about the changing life and values of traditional, rural Africa to audiences with different frames of reference. The students read about this change in a novel, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; identify the characters' frames of reference; and write from the frame of reference of an African in the novel to other characters in the novel. They write to a British colonial officer and then write the same assertion to a group of indigenous Africans. The assignment looks like this:

A. From the point of view of Okonkwo's friend, Obierika, write a paragraph to the British Commissioner and a second paragraph addressed to the leaders of Umuofia, suggesting a new title for the book the British Commissioner is planning to write. On a separate sheet of paper write the following:

- 1) Obierika's (writer) frame of reference.
- 2) British Commissioner's (reader) frame of reference.
- 3) List of information Obierika could use as evidence in communicating with the Commissioner.
- 4) Organizing idea (the main point Obierika wants to make).
- 5) Paragraph to British Commissioner.
- 6) Revised/developed organizing idea.
- 7) Frame of reference of leaders of Umuofia (reader).
- 8) Revised list of information to be used for these new readers.
- 9) Organizing idea (the main point Obierika wants to make).
- 10) Paragraph to readers of Umuofia.
- 11) Revised/developed organizing idea.

In writing these paragraphs, the students replicate the process of generating inferences and identifying others' frames of reference which they have practiced previously. At the same time, they develop awareness of the relationship between the writer's frame of reference, selection of

information, and assertion of an organizing idea; and of the relationship between the reader's frame of reference and the writer's selection of what to say and how to say it.

STRUCTURING A WRITTEN STATEMENT

The skills of conceptualization and analysis are not only basic to thinking about history, but also to writing complex, coherent statements about history. In writing, analysis and conceptualization underly the skills of organization—creating a structure—and of achieving coherence—revealing the structure to readers. Beginning college students may have difficulty with organization of history papers because organizing a multi-paragraph written statement often involves making complex relationships: synthesizing large amounts of heterogeneous and perhaps conflicting information in order to understand and articulate a question or assertion. They may have difficulty with coherence because they must write about the parts of that question or assertion in a way that reveals and resolves its complexity.

To achieve structural coherence in complex historical papers, writers need to learn first to make a plan, a plan in which major points are sequenced into a logical structure. Then they need to use this plan as they compose, following its structure and revealing it to readers. To make the structure clear, writers must keep their focus on major points they wish to make, explain and support these points, and help readers keep track of where the writer is and where the writer is going. We devised two units to deal with structure: one on planning a multi-paragraph written statement and one on coherence.

The first of these units takes students through a series of steps they have already practiced and adds new material on sequencing. The writers identify a historical problem (find a focus to write about) by reading a given selection, make a hypothesis in response to this problem, assemble and evaluate evidence that supports or refutes the hypothesis, and analyze the reader's frame of reference. To devise a structure or sequence in which to argue the hypothesis, using the evidence they have selected, they do this assignment:

- 1) Look again at the set of information you have collected and cross out what you can't use to explain your hypothesis.
- 2) Find relationships—commonalities—among the pieces of information you have listed. Then group or categorize the items according to these relationships. For example, you may be able to classify your bits of information as *effects* of change and as *causes* of change. Or you may decide

that you have categories that describe various aspects of life in a village, such as government, family life, and social customs.

3) List below your categories of information and on the line at the top of each list write a word or phrase that describes (labels) the common feature.

Label: a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____ e) _____
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Information:

4) Write an assertion about each of the above categories.

5) Using your organizing idea for the essay (hypothesis above) and your reader's frame of reference as your guide, decide on the best order in which to present your assertions about your categories of information. Number the assertions above to indicate the order in which you would present them.

To help students with the sequencing part of the activity, we present information and instruction in logical relationships or patterns, focusing primarily on commonly used patterns such as chronology, cause-effect, comparison-contrast, problem-solution, classification, and division.

With this plan in hand, the student is ready to write an extended paper. Instruction on how to begin—another frequent source of difficulty for our writers—starts with a method for writing introductions: tell your audience what you want to say about your subject (your organizing idea), your major supporting points (the organizing ideas of the individual paragraphs), and the order in which you intend to make these points. While this method for introduction seems, and in fact is, somewhat formulaic, it clearly helps beginning writers not only to forge through the psychological barrier of facing the blank page, but far more important, to crystallize their thinking and writing. The sample below illustrates one student's fundamental grasp of writing introductions to structured papers.

Africa's past is much stronger, older and more developed than commonly suspected. For example, highly centralized, advanced states existed in Africa much earlier than similar states in Europe. Unknown to many, Ethiopia is the oldest continuing Christian empire in the world. Also, these ancient African empires were not isolated from the outside world, as exemplified by early African trade. With specific detail of African states and their contact with the outside world, a glimpse into Africa's vast and rich past can be gained.

The final writing unit asks the students to pull together and use all the competencies they have practiced—to demonstrate what they have learned

about African history and about thinking and writing. The student plans and writes a paper on African independence movements, repeating the process used in the previous unit. This paper includes a conclusion that states a developed understanding and clarification of the original hypothesis—i.e., the conclusion functions in exactly the same way as the clarifying sentence, or revised organizing idea, that students learned to write for their paragraphs in the first writing unit. In this sense the completed essay brings the students a full circle.

Instruction comes full circle also in that the process of making relationships is finally turned from a focus on the writer's thinking to a focus on the reader—i.e., the unit deals with making relationships clear to readers. Discussion and explanation of readers' needs in comprehending a written statement emphasize the importance of revealing relationships at all levels of a statement: between all major assertions and the organizing idea of the whole statement, between successive major assertions (the organizing ideas of paragraphs), between the organizing ideas of a paragraph and the assertions that develop it, and between the successive assertions within a paragraph.

A device to help students perceive and gain coherence in the paragraph is Young, Becker and Pike's concept of lexical chains. According to this concept, the lead or main sentence in the paragraph introduces a focus, and that focus keeps recurring in the paragraph, providing a linked chain. The writer maintains the focus by repeating old information in each sentence; at the same time, the writer develops the paragraph by adding some new information in each sentence.⁹ Repetition occurs—the chain exists—by means of repeated key words, synonyms, and pronouns. Here is an example of a paragraph with the chain highlighted by italicized key words and bold-faced pronouns:

The great social change—the coming of the *city* and the modern way of life—was *not a pleasant experience* for the Africans who were and are caught up in it. The new men of the *towns* and the mines lived in a world of *bitter poverty* and great *personal frustration*. The *harsh discipline* of a regular job and the *loneliness* of being a stranger made an African envy the familiar life of **his** less enterprising brothers at home in the village. On every side the African in the *town* was *confronted* and *brushed aside* by the vastly greater wealth, education, and skills of **his** European rulers, from whom **he** was *separated* by a social gulf as great as the difference between **his** *tiny shack* and **their** comfortable houses with many servants. And whether it was called

⁹Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), p. 346.

color bar or culture bar, the African's *pride and self-confidence were hurt by European prejudice*.¹⁰

The chain concept helps writers see how readers come to understand the relationship between assertions, the line of reasoning that carries one through a series of sentences. Also, the chain concept helps writers see how to provide clues to the sequence of their argument. For example, the reference to “towns,” “poverty” and “frustration” in sentence two echoes the implications of “city” and “not a pleasant experience” in sentence one.

CONCLUSION

Our attempt to bring writing in the course full circle—more precisely, to provide instruction from prewriting strategies to the multi-paragraph paper—while also presenting new subject matter, was extremely ambitious, in fact too ambitious. Knowing this, we yet felt it was important to design and test sequential materials for dealing with the specific writing difficulties we identified as major ones; and by focusing on these four problems, we were able to a reasonable extent to control the course design. However, problems related to the amount of material appeared as we taught the course, some of which we predicted and some of which we did not predict. There were, as well, some satisfying results.

Student attitudes toward writing instruction and emphasis in a discipline-based course were initially and remained more resistant than we had expected. Many students, however, found the writing instruction valuable and even said it was the highlight of the course. And finally, even the most reluctant students seemed to come to appreciate the value of the writing instruction, in spite of the difficulties they had with it and the time it took.

As for the competencies of conceptualization, analysis, and structure, the students simply did not have enough time to master all of them. Because they were both beginning writers and beginning history students, they needed repeated practice in grouping information about African history, in finding a focus among that information, in making inferences, in identifying others' points of view, in sequencing information, in providing clues for the readers; and they needed more time for revision than we could give them. The lesson here is that there is real danger of overloading courses that integrate subject matter and writing instruction, especially at the introductory level.

¹⁰F. Seth Singleton and John Shingler, *Africa in Perspective* (New York: Hayden Book Company, 1967), p. 107.

Given these problems, however, we can identify some successes. We and an outsider compared preliminary writing samples with final essays. We all concluded that there was marked improvement in students' abilities to conceptualize, analyze, and structure information, and that development of these thinking and writing competencies helped the students gain sophisticated insights into the subject matter. Also, the students gained important new skills of detecting bias and analyzing others' points of view. An interesting feature of our results is that the more able writers, who in general tended to pay cursory attention to the writing instructions, improved relatively little, while noticeable improvement occurred in the writing of the weakest students, who tended to follow the writing instruction seriously and conscientiously. In sum, the evaluation showed that those students who used the writing instructions well wrote progressively better statements about course content.

What works in this model—particularly what furthered the development of writing abilities of the weakest students—is the tasks in each unit which are based on accepted theory about the teaching of writing. They are tasks that give students a real reason for writing—to make sense of an aspect of African history—and real readers, i.e., they invite “real rhetorical acts.”¹¹ The tasks are presented in a series of units. Each unit includes and builds upon skills practiced in previous ones, and all units are linked by the emphasis on making relationships. The progression of these units is developmental: it presents more and more complex tasks and encourages students to reach toward more and more maturity in thinking and writing. The cumulative nature of the subject matter undergirds the developmental progression of the thinking-writing tasks. Teaching writing to beginning college writers by integrating writing in subject matter courses works at least partly because these courses open up possibilities outside the traditional composition course.

APPENDIX

1. Look at the following list of words.

| | | |
|---------|-----------|--------------|
| Cuba | Rhodesia | West Germany |
| Chile | Greenland | Australia |
| Poland | England | Paraguay |
| Nigeria | Japan | Liberia |
| China | Russia | India |
| | Ireland | |

¹¹For an explanation of this relationship between theory and writing tasks and a list of “real rhetorical tasks” see John Warnock, “New Rhetoric and the Grammar of Pedagogy,” *Freshman English News* 5:2 (Fall 1976), p. 20.

2. List all the above words having a common feature in a single group under one of the lines below. On the line write a word (or title) that tells what the words in that group have in common. Do the same for words having another feature in common. Repeat this until all the above words are grouped. You may have two or more groups.

3. Look at the words in #1 again. Can you think of another way to classify or group them? Write the new groups below. Again, put a label over each group that tells what the words in that group have in common.

4. One person once arranged the words in #1 as follows:

| | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|---------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Cuba | Chile | Russia | England | Rhodesia | Greenland | West Germany |
| | China | Poland | Nigeria | Paraguay | Australia | |
| | Japan | | Ireland | | | |
| | India | | Liberia | | | |

5. Look at the items in each group. Write on the line above each group what the items in that group have in common.

6. What is the way of thinking behind this grouping of these words?

7. Here is another way the person who did the grouping of words in #4 grouped these same words. Write on the line above each group what the items in that group have in common.

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Cuba | India | Nigeria |
| Chile | Rhodesia | Liberia |
| China | Paraguay | West Germany |
| Japan | Australia | |
| Russia | | |
| Poland | | |
| England | | |
| Ireland | | |
| Greenland | | |

8. What is the way of thinking behind this grouping of these words?
9. Describe the attitude or frame of reference behind these groupings of the words.
10. What was your way of thinking when you grouped the words in item 2?
11. Describe the frame of reference behind your grouping of these words.
12. Did you use a different frame of reference in your second way of grouping them (item 3)? If so, describe that frame of reference.

John D. Reiff

THE IN-COURSE WRITING WORKSHOP IN A PROGRAM OF WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Claiming the responsibility of teaching its students to write better, the faculty of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts at the University of Michigan voted in 1978 to establish a program of writing across the curriculum. First-year students will continue either to take or be exempted from introductory composition—a course which the English department will continue to teach—but in addition, each student will be required as a junior or senior to take one of the new upper-level writing courses taught by departments throughout the college. Like any other upper-level course in, for instance, biology or anthropology, each course will cover an area of content within its discipline, but each will also give special attention to the demands of writing about its material.¹ As the college phases in the program over a period of three years, departments are trying out different ways of combining their course material with instruction in writing. This report describes the development of one such model—the in-course writing workshop.

The history department's colloquium on the Indochina conflict (1945-1975) was designated in Winter, 1979 as one of the upper-level writing courses, and I was hired to assist with writing instruction. The history

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1. The college set up a board of faculty members from across the college—the English Composition Board—and charged it with coordinating this upper-level writing program, as well as with the following five functions: 1) the development and administration of a writing assessment to determine whether entering students should go into the tutorial program, introductory composition, or be exempted from composition; 2) coordination with the introductory composition program; 3) the development of a tutorial program for entering students who have not had sufficient practice in academic composition to write successfully at the college level; 4) research into writing and writing instruction; and 5) outreach to those high schools which send a significant number of students to the university.

professor responsible for the course had taught it several times before, assigning informal weekly journals and a long formal paper due the last day of class. That winter semester he simply plugged me into his course as a second reader of the journals; he commented on their content, while I was supposed to comment on them as writing.

The students rightly understood these journals as informal and made little effort at producing polished or sustained pieces of prose, yet this was the only writing they did in the course for most of the semester. It quickly became clear that in such a structure my written comments were of little instructional value. Learning from this failure, I proposed that we restructure the writing component in subsequent semesters so I could intervene more in the processes of student writing. Last fall we taught the course with more formal writing assignments, and I organized and ran an in-course workshop which guided student work on each assignment.

COURSE STRUCTURE: AN OVERVIEW

Students read extensively each week and were expected to respond to the readings in informal weekly journals. Every week they met for two hours with the history professor to discuss the week's readings, hand in their journal entries, and receive their journals of the previous week with his lengthy comments. This readings/journal/seminar format seemed to work well in engaging the students in analysis of and dialogue about the course material. Students were also required to write three fairly lengthy formal papers, and to meet with me for an hour each week in the writing workshop to work on them. Scheduling problems led me to divide the group and meet with each half at a separate time—a fortunate accident, because in the smaller groups I was much more able to attend to each student's writing.

I set two main objectives for the workshop—to help the students begin each assignment, by interpreting what it required and by generating approaches, ideas, and lines of analysis, and to provide them with feedback they could use in preparing a final draft. I structured the workshop, therefore, to intervene at two stages in their writing—in *pre-writing*, before they produced a draft, and in *revision*. In both stages I arranged for students to receive models to consider and to receive feedback on their own writing. I first clarified the particular demands of each assignment: what would a good paper have to do to meet this particular assignment? I then got students to state briefly what they expected their papers to do, and I analyzed their approaches for strengths and possible weaknesses. A first draft was due a week before the final deadline for each paper; I organized the students into small editing groups to read one another's first drafts and provide feedback. After revisions, they gave their papers to the professor

for final evaluation; since I had no responsibility for final evaluation, my role was that of a consultant working with them.

THE THREE ASSIGNMENTS: PRE-WRITING WORK

The first assignment was an eight-to-twelve page critical essay analyzing journalistic coverage of the Indochina war, due after the first third of the semester. The second assignment, due at the end of the second third of the semester, was an oral history project: students were to interview someone directly affected by the war, transcribe the interview, and write a three-to-five-page commentary analyzing the interview in the context of the war. The final assignment, due the last day of class, was a conventional fifteen-to-twenty-five-page research paper on some aspect of the conflict.

At the first meeting of the workshop I explained its rationale and structure; at the second meeting I began pre-writing work. I asked the students to consider how the assignments might mesh together, perhaps through continuity of theme (i.e., an issue or relationship which emerged from the journalistic coverage or the oral history might be made the subject of the research paper) or through continuity of time period (i.e., one might choose an event to analyze in the research paper, then take one's sample of journalistic coverage from the year the event occurred). I also discussed a handout which listed the kinds of questions the first assignment might try to answer—questions including the following: What view, or range of views, of the Indochina conflict came through in the sample of news media? What terminology was used for the activities of the various contenders for power? What were the apparent criteria for deciding what got reported and what did not? What were the apparent sources of information and opinion? What are the uses and limitations of the daily press and news magazines as historical sources?

The following week I asked everyone to write ten-minute abstracts of their papers-to-be; I then put some of the abstracts on an opaque projector and showed them to the class, leading discussion of strengths and problems in the student's approach. This exercise served 1) to push all the class to attempt to formulate their main ideas, sketch out their proposed development, and discover what difficulties they still faced, 2) to provide some of the students with immediate feedback on those initial formulations, and 3) to provide the rest of the students with models of both successful and problematic approaches.

Pre-writing for the second assignment began with discussion of the mechanical, interpersonal, and conceptual tasks involved in doing oral history—both before, during, and after the interview. The mechanical tasks—making a clear tape recording and converting that into an accurate

transcript—underlie the production of a usable record. Interaction with the informant includes setting up the interview and following through after it, as well as the interviewer's questions and responses in the interview itself. The conceptual tasks begin with the interviewer's determination of priorities before the interview, include interpretation during the interview, and conclude with analysis of the oral history after the interview is transcribed. After spending two weeks in discussion of these tasks (which I also sketched out in a handout: see the Appendix), we spent the next two weeks working with interviews that some of the class had just conducted; we focused on them both as models of interviewing technique and as information to be interpreted in a commentary.

For the final assignment, I discussed with the students the process of research and their particular problems in framing a question and finding, organizing, and interpreting information. Their written responses to the questions on another handout, my research guide (below), helped me pinpoint their difficulties and confronted those who were behind schedule with the steps still ahead of them.

RESEARCH GUIDE

1. **TOPIC.** Have you decided on a subject to research?

If so, what is it?

If not, what subjects are you considering?

2. **GUIDING QUESTION.** What question would your research try to answer?

If you haven't established one central question, what questions might you try to answer?

3. **HYPOTHESIS.** What do you think an answer to your question (s) will/might be?

4. **EVIDENCE.** What information have you already found that relates to your questions?

From what sources?

What further sources do you plan to explore?

What do you expect to find in them?

5. **CONCLUSIONS.** If the evidence you find supports your hypothesis, so what?

What does this research mean in any larger context?

6. **DOCUMENTATION.** Do you have any questions about how to document the information you use in this paper—in handling quotes, in paraphrases, footnotes, a bibliography, etc.?

7. **POSSIBLE PROBLEMS.** What problems do you foresee with this assignment?

What would you (or we) need to do to solve them?

THE THREE ASSIGNMENTS: DRAFT AND REVISION

Each paper was due in draft form a week before the final deadline. I divided the class into editing groups of three or four; on the weeks that first drafts were due, every student was expected to bring xerox copies of her or his draft to the Tuesday seminar meeting for the other members of the editing group. In the next couple of days, students read and wrote comments on the papers they had received; then I met with each editing group to facilitate the exchange of feedback. I too read drafts when a group member failed to show up for the exchange, or whenever anyone asked me to.

Feedback came along any of the following three lines:

- 1) Can I *understand* everything in your paper? If not, where does it lose me?
- 2) Does your evidence and your interpretation *convince* me? If not, what alternatives can I suggest for you to consider?
- 3) Could your paper be made more *effective*—in its conception of its audience, in its organization, or in its style and mechanics?

Using what they learned through the draft exchange, students could then revise their papers before handing them in to the history professor for final evaluation.

EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP

There were problems. A couple of students participated only marginally, missing several workshop sessions. Some of the oral history interviews were less focused than we wished for; more direction from me beforehand and perhaps some practice interviews would have helped the students focus better. From one to five of the students failed to have first drafts ready for a draft exchange, and thereby missed receiving feedback on those first drafts.

For the majority of the students, however, the workshop made significant differences. They usually got a draft finished—or at least well along— before the exchange deadline, and thus had time to make needed alterations, great or small. For some of them, this critique-and-revision process allowed their writing to become more an integration of what they were coming to know, and less a frantic last-minute churning out of pages.

The most important workshop intervention was in students' conceptualization of the assignments' demands. Students made initial conceptualizations when they had to write about their papers-to-be (in the

abstracts and research guides); they then received feedback and saw other models for approaching the assignment. For those students who got a draft written without successfully understanding the assignment, the draft exchange provided them with more pointed feedback and with more developed models of successful approaches. In the evaluation I did after the first assignment, one student wrote that the editing meeting was especially helpful to him “in discerning what was to be the major point of my paper—what my strongest argument was.” Another described in even stronger terms how the draft exchange helped her reconceive the assignment: “I was lost on the first assignment; it wasn’t until after the first draft I knew what to do.”

In addition to the students’ overall conceptualization, the workshop contributed to the “fine tuning” of papers—the selection of the more elegant or at least less awkward phrase, the insertion of appropriate punctuation, the deletion of redundancy. Finally, the workshop helped student writers by adding to their sources of information: they suggested to each other relevant readings and possible oral history informants.

In their own evaluations of the workshop, the majority of the students described it as helpful at both the planning and revising stages. The pre-writing stage helped by clarifying their understanding of the assignment, by getting them working earlier (“it kicked me in the rear to get started,” said one student), and by helping them sort out their ideas and choose topics. The student whose successive drafts showed probably the most dramatic improvement said of the editing stage, “Good criticism of my draft helped me to think. I learned to criticize and analyze—something I’d never done before.” I asked what changes they would suggest for the workshop itself, and the most frequent response was to ask for more—more or longer editing sessions, and more time between the completion of the first draft and the deadline for the final draft, to allow for more thorough revision.

CONCLUSIONS

In-course writing workshops can be adapted to many upper-level writing courses. The ideal leader for such a workshop is someone with knowledge both of the content area and of writing instruction; both kinds of knowledge will contribute to his or her effectiveness. If the workshop leader is relatively unfamiliar with the teaching of writing, he or she should be able to participate in a program like our English Composition Board upper-level seminar, where faculty and teaching assistants involved in this program meet weekly for two hours to discuss writing across the curriculum and to analyze and try to resolve the instructional problems that inevitably arise.

Since the amount and quality of student participation in a writing workshop seems to depend in part on the nearness of a deadline, it seems sensible to use the workshop with courses that have more than one major writing assignment. Since all the pre-writing, writing, and editing in a successful workshop demand a significant amount of time from the students, courses with workshops might reward student involvement by offering an additional hour of credit; where that is not possible, the content instructor must make an appropriate reduction in her or his expectations for readings and other work in the course. The in-course workshop can help student writers in a wide range of disciplines grow in competence and confidence; continuing evaluation of such workshops will show in what ways and under what conditions they are most useful.

APPENDIX
STEPS IN THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

| | Producing a useable record | Interaction with the person | Interpretation |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Before the interview: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get familiar with the recorder. 2. Get 60-min. tape (not 90 or 120), because 60-min. is less likely to break. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare your own interview agreement, or familiarize yourself with the handout. 2. Get your informant's verbal agreement to do the interview; explain briefly what you are doing. 3. Set a time and place for the interview; make it at your informant's convenience, but make sure you will be quiet and undisturbed. 4. Think through what this interview might offer your informant. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decide on your priorities; sketch out questions (consider open-ended vs. closed questions). 2. Read all the background information you can—everything that will help you understand your informant's story in detail and in overall shape. |
| In the interview: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Screen out as much outside noise as possible. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get the permission form signed; let your informant know how you'll provide feedback. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Try to understand both the <i>what</i> of the person's story and the <i>how</i> of its telling. |

| | Producing a usable record | Interaction with the person | Interpretation |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| | <p>2. Take time to set up your recorder properly (so it records both of you clearly, and is insulated from its own noise). Check to see that it is working.</p> | <p>2. What you want to know may not be what your informant wants to tell you; be alert for that tension.</p> <p>3. Ways of probing: —“cueing” with informant’s words. —asking for elaboration. —asking for specification.</p> <p>4. Summarize.</p> | <p>2. Keep your preparation in mind: it may help you frame questions on the spot.</p> |
| After the interview: | <p>1. Decide on the extent to which you will edit the transcript for standard language.</p> <p>2. Make a rough transcript.</p> <p>3. Audit the rough transcript: compare the transcript to the tape, from start to finish, and correct errors in transcription.</p> <p>4. Get a clean copy of your transcript to your informant.</p> <p>(5. Get feedback from your informant and use it to revise the transcript.)</p> | <p>1. Get a clean copy of your transcript to your informant.</p> | <p>1. Abstract from your informant’s story its most important features.</p> <p>2. Place this story in the historical context(s) which it illuminates and which illuminate it.</p> |

SOUND AND SENSE: WRITING ABOUT MUSIC

It's hard to write well about music. The problem involves translating the sounds of a non-referential language with its own strictly musical meanings into a language that explains musical meanings logically and verbally. But the sound of music is not readily translatable into the sound of sense. Good music writing, nonetheless, somehow succeeds in making sense; it makes sense in what it says directly about the music, and in what it suggests indirectly, in what circumscribes the music as well.

One of the more successful and exciting ways of writing about music is to imitate the sounds, textures, and forms of music, to create, partly through the vocabulary of music, partly through controlling the sounds and rhythms of language, poems that make music. Among the more deservedly famous examples are John Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" and "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," Wallace Stevens' "Peter Quince at the Clavier," D.H. Lawrence's "Piano," and Langston Hughes' jazz poems. Such poems make musical sense as well as logical sense. Their language expresses, through particularly successful mimetic stratagems, the sound, style, tone, or mood of the music that the poems both describe and create.

But one doesn't have to write poetry to write well about music. George Bernard Shaw, Aaron Copland, Whitney Balliett, Bernard Haggin, and Leonard Bernstein are some who have served music well in prose characterized by clarity, sense, grace, wit, and passion. These and other music writers do not always write directly about musical sounds; sometimes they write around the music, skirting the sounds to discuss matters peripheral and ancillary to music itself, coming directly at the musical sounds only momentarily in brief stints of description and analysis. And it is in such direct attempts to characterize or capture the music in words that most music writers fail—by turning either to highly technical

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language or to a series of subjective responses. Only a few, in fact, have written well about music in prose; more often than not they are either professional musicians who know how to write, like Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and Virgil Thompson, or professional writers who know how to listen, such as George Bernard Shaw, Bernard Haggin, and Whitney Balliett.

In spite of the difficulty of writing well about music, or perhaps because of it, a course in "Writing About Music" can be especially useful, even attractive, for college students. Pragmatic as they are, students may see such a course as one way of relating a writing requirement both to immediate academic circumstances and to their later lives. Or they may see it simply as an opportunity to discuss what interests them.

Such a course has advantages for instructors as well. It allows teachers who love music to indulge, in the classroom, one of their stronger avocational passions. Moreover, it brings together students and teachers with a shared interest, often with an ardent enthusiasm for music, bonding them in special and mysterious ways. Finally, the sharp focus of subject lends an advanced composition course a coherence it might normally lack.

But there is one major difficulty: the students taking a music writing course often have widely varying musical backgrounds, and, in addition, different degrees of both musical knowledge and writing proficiency. To illustrate how a musically various student population can be accommodated and to explain how one such course for writers with different degrees of skill might be structured is my purpose in describing my course "Writing About Music" at Queens College (CUNY).

I have taught English 6.8, "Writing About Music," for three semesters, to about fifty students. Although most of the students are sophomores, the rest range from freshmen to seniors. And although most take the course to satisfy a second-semester writing requirement, some take it as an elective, simply for fun. Surprisingly few are music majors. Of the non-music-major majority, few know much about classical music or express even the slightest interest in it. Some express contempt for it. Coupled with this limitation of musical knowledge is a parochialism that affects classical enthusiasts as well as jazz fans, rock lovers as well as disco habitués. Moreover, the prejudices can be as strong within a particular musical camp as they are between camps. Students who advocate a specific kind of popular music such as new wave or punk rock, for example, are often insistent about and impatient with what they consider the inanity, tawdriness, or banality of other kinds of popular music not much different from what they currently accept as musical gospel.

This musical demography cannot be ignored. A writing teacher in my circumstances—and I think in most circumstances, except perhaps in a

conservatory of music—will rarely confront a homogeneous group of music lovers. And even if he or she does, teacher and students might very well hold to different musical ideals. These differences of musical opinion, affinity, and experience can create tension, hostility and fear, resulting in a fractured class. But they don't have to. In fact, the variousness of the students' musical interests and experience may be, perhaps ought to be, exploited by the instructor. Disagreements that arise in class discussion, for example, can be made occasions for encouraging students to argue their positions more fully and finely in their written work. Beyond this, students can, in small ways, instruct one another in their areas of expertise—by *ad hoc* explanations of terms, by impromptu musical demonstrations. I once had a student demonstrate a “riff” by playing one on his trombone; on another occasion a student illustrated the differences between chest singing and head singing with a bit of extemporaneous vocalizing.

But such attempts at flexibility, important as they may be, derive less from the nature of a course in writing about music than from the patience and tact of the instructor. Other very different kinds of accommodations, however, can be built into the course requirements, especially into the materials and assignments.

First, the materials. The primary material for the course is the students' own writing, produced both in small bursts in the classroom through finger exercises—loose ones like speculating on a question or reacting to a song and stricter ones like imitating sentence patterns or working with metaphor and analogy—and in longer essays at home. Students read their essays aloud to the class as audience, and they confer with me between drafts. In addition to their own productions, the class reads essays and articles by professionals: Ralph Ellison and Whitney Balliett on jazz; Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Bernard Haggin, and George Bernard Shaw on the classics; current periodicals such as *Stereo Review* on popular music. Beyond these readings, I encourage students to write for the campus newspapers, to write reviews, feature articles, and persuasive essays, and to do interviews as well. Occasionally, I have asked students to bring in a record or tape, which then serves as a catalyst for writing.

In the writing assignments, I try for diversity in approach, mode, and problem, allowing students to choose their own subjects and to write all their essays about whatever music they know best—an option most of them take. I have had students who have written every paper on jazz or on rock. One student wrote consistently on punk rock. Another wrote eight essays on classical music—all about the piano.

Since I am not training music critics, and since the range of student ability varies widely, I do not require that they always write directly about the music, either analytically or descriptively. They can write around the

music as well—at least some of the time. My essay assignments reflect this mix of writing about music and around it, and, for a semester's work, typically include an autobiographical essay about a musical experience; a speculative essay; an analysis; an essay on an instrument: playing the flute, the decline of the harmonica, the guitar as a concert instrument; an essay on a performer or composer, looking especially at style or musical ancestry; two reviews, one of a record, the other of a concert; and, finally, a research essay, usually with a historical slant.

I have twice begun the course with the autobiographical essay. Most students write either a loosely structured reminiscence, or, singling out an especially important musical moment in their lives, write a chronological narrative. Some combine the two. My springboard into the assignment combines class discussion of musical recollections with analysis of a superb essay by Ralph Ellison, "Living With Music,"¹ an essay which describes, among other things, his struggle in learning to play the trumpet, his love of vocal singing, his respect and love for musicians of discipline and integrity, his personal reconciliation of jazz and classical music, and very conveniently for me, his struggle to write. This piece is honest, compassionate, humorous, engaging—and beautifully, even hauntingly written. I return to it later in the term for exercises in diction and style.

An alternative to beginning with a personal experience essay is to begin with the music writing most familiar to students: the record review. I have done this also, following the review with the autobiographical assignment. In either case, I use the record review as an early assignment and the concert review near the end of the term both for practical reasons—the students need time to attend a concert—and for aesthetic ones, so that the course comes full circle.

The speculative essay is a rather loose assignment that simply invites the student to explore a musical question, issue, or problem. It might be as broad as "Why do people listen to music?" or "Why do people attend concerts?" It might be more focused: "Why is disco currently fashionable?"; "What is the future of punk rock?"; "Why are most disco stars women and most rock stars men?" The questions might be answered in a sentence or two, but I ask the students to expand that simple answer, particularly by considering numerous possibilities as satisfactory answers, at least provisionally. I try, in this early assignment, to encourage imaginative thinking, to put the emphasis not on being right or on proving a point persuasively, but on invention and discovery of ideas through considering

¹Ralph Ellison, "Living With Music," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, Vintage paper edition, 1972), pp. 187-198.

alternate, even opposite explanations, through asking questions of questions of questions, and through making connections among disparate facts.

The essay on an instrument can be used as a transitional piece, moving from the looser forms of autobiography, review, and speculation to the stricter forms of definition, description, and analysis. Students can be asked to write two essays on an instrument, perhaps for different audiences, perhaps in different styles, tones, or moods. They can, for example, describe what it's like to play different instruments, or they can celebrate one above all others; they can compare, classify, define one or more types of a particular instrument, or look into its history.

Perhaps the assignment which most requires accommodations is the analysis essay, since some students simply don't have enough musical knowledge to write a good technical analysis. And yet some kind of practice in analysis, however abbreviated or attenuated, can certainly enhance the students' musical understanding. Less musically prepared students can select a popular song, or one of their long-time favorites, and take it apart section by section, describing what they hear. They can be encouraged to watch the way the song develops, to see what it repeats and why; they can be invited to explain the connections between the appropriateness of music and lyrics. Class discussion can center generally on specific problems in analysis and can demonstrate with simple pieces how one goes about analyzing a piece of music. In fact, analytic procedures might even be illustrated with non-musical materials, with advertisements for example, at least as an adjunct to the musical analysis demonstrated. For the more musically knowledgeable, the analysis assignment provides an opportunity to do a serious and thorough interpretation of a short piece of music. The essays of these musically experienced students ought to be more detailed, more technical, and more rigorous than most of their earlier, less musically analytical writing.

One other assignment that bulks large in the students' consciousness is the research essay—simply because it requires them to go outside of themselves for ideas. At Queens, it requires also that they familiarize themselves with a separate and well-stocked music library. I try to keep this assignment from dominating either the course or the students by limiting it to five typed pages and by requiring only four sources. Ideally, the research essay grows out of and elaborates on an earlier essay, but it might just as easily be an entirely new piece. I suggest that it have a historical slant and that the student trace the development of a performer's or composer's career. I encourage the students to search out and explore origins, influences, developments, and continuities. And I urge, finally, that the research topic be a question to which the paper is an answer.

The assignments, taken together, give a reasonably broad experience of writing about music. They require the use of different modes of discourse, asking the student to narrate, describe, explain, speculate, and persuade. They are designed to encourage students to mix modes and to combine the basic patterns of exposition the way skilled writers normally do. And, of course, through exercises in writing, thinking, and knowing, these assignments are my way of introducing a wide range of rhetorical concerns: invention, arrangement, and style; pre-writing, writing, and re-writing; audience, purpose, structure, and tone.

Of the traditional concerns of rhetoric, style receives the most attention in my course. Aspects of syntax and diction are regularly recurring centers of interest both in the professional writing we analyze and in the writing the students themselves produce, both in class and at home. The students work primarily at imitating and experimenting with varied sentence forms and patterns, and with simile, metaphor, and analogy as well.

These two concerns—the first, learning to expand and vary the sentence in form, length, and emphasis and to mix sentences effectively, the second, learning to describe and explain through analogy and metaphor—are essential if students are to write effectively about music. Both sentence control and analogical writing are especially important for describing what it's like to hear a particular piece of music and for giving a sense of the music itself. This attempt to capture in language the sounds of music is the most difficult aspect of writing about music; it is also what distinguishes writing about music from writing about other subjects. This is not to suggest that writing about science, to choose but one example, doesn't require the use of imaginative analogy and metaphor or the assistance of resilient and flexible sentences. But writing about music requires, even more fully than writing about other disciplines, controlled and imaginative use of syntax and metaphor.

Both of these emphases, moreover, but especially the work with metaphor, serve to help the music writer keep a reasonable balance between his subjective experience and the objective world. Because music is such a strongly connotative medium, a medium which creates intense and widely varying effects in its listeners, and because it stimulates emotion in complex and mysterious ways, it is both a powerfully expressive and an unstable medium. For the music writer, an awareness of the subjectivity of his own responses is a necessary precondition for writing with even a modicum of objectivity and communicability for a non-specialist audience.

To illustrate how close music critics have come in making sense of musical sound, I presented representative selections from a few writers. Although they are writing for different audiences in a wide range of styles, each of these writers reveals an awareness of the subjective nature of the

music writing enterprise, both controlling and exploiting that subjectivity by a sureness of syntax and a penchant for creative analogy. First, Leonard Bernstein writing for children:

Let's just see how Tchaikovsky went about building up that lovely theme of his by simply repeating his ideas in a certain arranged order—what I like to call the 1-2-3 method. In fact so many famous themes are formed by exactly this method that I think you ought to know about it. Here's how it works: first of all there is a short idea, or phrase: (musical quote)—second, the same phrase is repeated, but with a small variation: (musical quote)—and third, the tune takes off in a flight of inspiration: (musical quote). 1, 2, and 3—like a 3-stage rocket, or like the countdown in a race: “On your mark, get set, go!” Or in target practice: “Ready, aim, fire!” Or in a movie studio: “Lights, camera, action!” It's always the same 1, 2, and 3!²

And Bernstein again, this time writing for adults:

So we're in the midst of a chromatic adventure. How do we get out of this strange A-flat territory? (musical quote). By a simple chromatic shift, like side-slipping on skis (quote)—and there we are back safely in B-flat major, where we belong.

Now, if you could follow that, you can follow any number of similar adventures—for instance, the way Mozart starts his development. He has established us firmly in B-flat major (quote); but, no (quote), off he goes on another chromatic adventure (quote) which lands us in the impossible key of F-sharp minor! Now, this was done by absolute whim—arbitrarily. It's a bit of chromatic acrobatics, if you will, startling us into a development section, which is just what a development should be—startling new looks at old material. But, eventually, he must get us back to a recapitulation in G minor, the original home soil.³

I like to ask my students to compare the passages for tone, content, and style. Both passages are highly conversational, informal, and colloquial; both rely heavily on comparison, the first passage on analogy, the second on metaphor; both are unabashedly didactic. Equally noteworthy are the differences: the more complex idea of the second passage, its use of metaphor rather than analogy, its inclusion of technical musical

²Leonard Bernstein, *Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, rev., 1970), pp. 16-18.

³Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.43.

terminology. Both are typical of Bernstein in his role as teacher—a successful teacher largely because of his skill with seeing one thing in terms of another.

But not all successful writers about music use metaphor in just the way Bernstein does. I include for analysis a few examples from writers whose metaphoric tone and touch are both different from Bernstein's and different from one another's. Here, in straightforward and clear simple prose is Aaron Copland describing timbre:

After rhythm, melody, and harmony, comes timbre, or tone color. Just as it is impossible to hear speech without hearing some specific timbre, so music can exist only in terms of some specific color in tone. Timbre in music is analogous to color in painting. . . . Just as most mortals know the difference between white and green, so the recognition of differences in tone color is an innate sense with which most of us are born. It is difficult to imagine a person so "tone-blind" that he cannot tell a bass voice from a soprano, or, to put it instrumentally, a tuba from a cello.⁴

And here, in more elaborate prose, spiced lightly with humor, is George Bernard Shaw performing a similar didactic function:

The music of the eighteenth century is all dance music. A dance is a symmetrical pattern of steps that are pleasant to move to; and its music is a symmetrical pattern of sound that is pleasant to listen to even when you are not dancing to it. Consequently the sound patterns, though they begin by being as simple as chessboards, get lengthened and elaborated and enriched with harmonies until they are more like Persian carpets; and the composers who design these patterns no longer expect people to dance to them. Only a whirling Dervish could dance a Mozart symphony: indeed, I have reduced two young and practiced dancers to exhaustion by making them dance a Mozart overture.⁵

Finally, Whitney Balliett, the jazz critic, in language which tries to capture the sound and feeling of the experience, describes a performance:

Taylor, as is his wont, played just one number, but it lasted forty minutes. It was full of his usual devices—the slamming chords, the agitated staccato passages, the breathtaking arpeggios, the blizzard density—but it had two new qualities: lyricism and gentleness. Again and again, after Taylor had

⁴Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1939, rev., 1957, New American Library, Mentor paper edition, 1957), p. 56.

⁵George Bernard Shaw, *The Great Composers: Reviews and Bombardments*, ed., Louis Crompton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 19.

launched one of his tidal waves, his hands going up and down like driving rods, he slipped into clear lagoons where shadows of melody glided just below the surface.⁶

Whatever students may think of such imaginative flights of language in this extravagant, almost Baroque prose, such writing is useful pedagogically for its command of metaphor and for its daring; it risks going too far for the sake of trying to give the reader what the listener saw and heard. And Balliett's control of syntax, worthy of in-class imitation exercises, is an additional attraction.

III

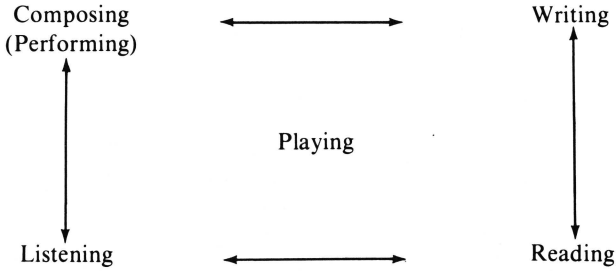
Implicit in my discussion of writing about music are a number of connections between writing and music, between making music and listening to it, and further, between and among writing, listening, and reading. First, good music, like good writing, begins and ends in feeling for music makers as well as for writers, for listeners as well as for readers. And the driving impulse in both forms of composing, from the initial emotional stirring to the final complex web of feeling, is the impulse of expression. But if writers and musicians—and here again I mean both performers and composers—are to be successful, it cannot end there. Rather, this initial emotional impulse must be followed, caught, controlled, and shaped so that the organized sounds, whether verbal or musical, make sense. Only then does the composer's music or writing become communicable. Only then can it move from feeling to form and back again through form to a new and enriched kind of feeling.

But neither writing nor music is all feeling and form. Music and writing are also play: performers play instruments and they play music, composers play with themes and motives, writers play with words, sentences, and forms. And, in both the game of notes and the game of words, play is important as a tactic of invention: it eliminates blockages; it reduces frustration; it assists serendipitous discoveries. We play with notes and with words to find forms, to discover ideas, to communicate with others and, ultimately, with ourselves.

Play with music and with language, however, is not limited to music and language makers; it is shared by listeners and readers as well. By the very acts of listening and reading, those less obvious but no less active performers enter the game. Listeners and readers play with what they hear,

⁶Whitney Balliett, *New York Notes: A Journal of Jazz in the Seventies*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), p. 26.

interpreting it, sizing it up, relating, elaborating, and putting together the things they hear in new ways, forming from them new wholes. These four activities, writing, reading, listening, and composing, are reciprocal and overlapping acts which reinforce and stimulate one another. They might be diagrammed like this:



The horizontal pairs designate parallel activities, the vertical pairs reciprocal ones.

But, however we choose to think about the connections between the languages of writing and music, however we choose to decode and describe these activities, one thing is certain: language and music, however different their basic data of sound, however unique their raw material, together derive from and ultimately rest upon the reciprocal impulses of expression and communication. Harnessing powerful feelings, they create forms of sound and sense capable of being heard, felt, and understood. And finally, the thing that makes writing about music exacting yet exciting is the challenge of translating those fleeting, evanescent sounds with their intangible textures, colors, and shades of feeling into words, into language that captures these sounds and communicates as far as possible what it is like to hear them.

ART AND THE WRITTEN WORD

The five exercises described in this article were selected from a larger number that I developed for teaching a course in art history at the New School of Liberal Arts at Brooklyn College. They present an opportunity to develop a unique understanding of the relationship between art and the written word. Their interdisciplinary nature reflects the spirit of the New School of Liberal Arts, where each course is used as an opportunity for teaching writing.

The results of these exercises are not judged by standards of academic excellence. Both the art and the writing are used to encourage the students to seek new experiences. The Quipu exercise can help the students overcome the inhibitions of autobiography, the sketching assignments might be included in journal keeping, and the hand study can inspire a reverence for life; exercises with clay can help the writing teacher to explain how words are expressed or emphasized through gesture.

I encourage students to write poetry because I think poetry fosters creative images. Words, like clay, are a medium in which to express thoughts and feelings. We who have the opportunity can develop image-making ability in our students.

By examining ideas that have motivated creative expressions from earliest times, the students develop a sense of perspective. Emphasis is placed on discovering what a point of view really is. All creative work is directed toward this end. Most assignments require both a three dimensional and a written exposition. My goal is not the formal essay; it is to allow for a depth of creative experience. Thus my approach complements, rather than replaces, more traditional methods of teaching writing.

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QUIPU: A MNEMONIC DEVICE—A NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE

This first assignment challenges students to “write without words.” The Quipu was used by the pre-literate Incas to record events, inventories, and intervals of personal histories. Colorful knotted strings were tied together, each color and each knot conveying a significant message. The rosary beads of the Catholic religion are a modern example of this kind of memory aid.

In this assignment the students are asked to make Quipu that represent their personal histories. They are encouraged to use abstract symbols. There are no restrictions on their choice of media.

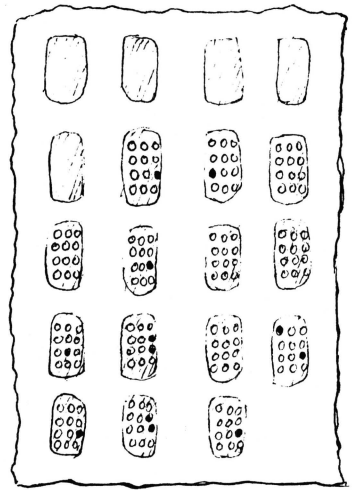
This exercise is an opening, a way to point out differences of perception that occur within the class. These differences are then translated to the wider arc of the ancient world where the Quipu-quality, or hidden message of pre-literate people’s art is revealed. Though these visual records are often compelling in a rather seminal way, they point to the limitations inherent in non-verbal communication. Not until each student has explained his own Quipu can the others be certain of its message.

Quipu can be used as the first step toward the writing of autobiography. Here is a graphic example of how all events in a person’s life are related not only sequentially, but also culturally and emotionally. The things that appear important can, through the use of Quipu, be placed in unique perspective. From the instruction “show me your history,” it is an easy step to “write me your history.”

1. “My Quipu is made of rope. The beginning is colored red to represent my birth. There is a black rope braided with a natural colored rope to represent the dark, troubled childhood I experienced. There is a large red knot tied near the middle. This is my tour of duty in Vietnam. After that the color becomes neutral; life was less traumatic. There are ‘loose ends’ that represent the unknown future.” (This Quipu is six feet long, the same length as its maker.)



2. "Each rectangle represents one year of my life. The dots occur after the fifth year, when time and events began to hold meaning. The black and red dots are placed where I have experienced moments of change or insight.") This Quipu is a piece of tan fabric twelve by sixteen inches. There are nineteen light-brown rectangles printed on it. Each rectangle except the first five has twelve white dots placed at even intervals. Scattered among these are twelve dots that are colored either red or black.



SKETCHING: THE TRANSLATION OF VISION INTO GESTURE, THE DISCOVERY OF A POINT OF VIEW

Sketching is an exercise that develops both observation and understanding. The quality of the lines is as important as the accuracy of the student's interpretation of what he is drawing. The lines reveal tension, interpretation, and concentration. I assign weekly sketching problems, insisting that a soft lead pencil be the only tool. Often students will use a ruler when drawing architectural details. The lines that result from this are cold and lifeless, bearing the character of the machine that made the ruler. They are easily recognized. I stress the importance of the sense of pulse and breath that exists in the freely drawn line. These unconscious rhythms of nature lend life to our creative actions.

Sketching is a way of describing experience without using words, but it is a step nearer to the written word than the Quipu. It awakens in us a consciousness of how we exclaim "I see!" when we recognize that we understand.

In the first assignment I ask the students to draw the doorway they pass through each day when entering or leaving their homes. This is an attempt to awaken the sense of separation, the change of focus, that transpires when one moves from inner, intimate surroundings to outer, social space. We talk about doorways and find other words for them such as gate, barrier, arch, portal, or threshold. We discuss the different images created by these words. I encourage the students to write about their doorways, to describe

them, and to discover what the doorways say about the rest of the building. I ask if the “promise” the doorway suggests is consistent with the images encountered inside. I ask that they take the idea of *threshold*, whose root means to cross-over, and relate it to other experiences they have had.

The assignments that follow require the students to sketch, in turn, each room of their home. I ask them to study each room from only one point of view, to establish a sense of physical perspective. Here they learn that perspective is a point of view. We consider how important it is to discover where you are before trying to establish where other things are. From this comes a comprehension of what it means to have a point of view, whether it be a place to stand or to take a stand.

The final sketching assignment asks for a self-portrait and a written self-description. The students are encouraged to describe themselves beyond their physical appearance. I ask them to write about what they are really like. It isn't easy to draw oneself, but the attempt seems to lessen the resistance to writing about oneself.

THE PALEOLITHIC HAND: ANCIENT GESTURE ON THE WALL OF TIME

Among all the images left by Paleolithic artists in caves, the hand is unique and provocative. Unlike the other majestic forms found there, the hands are not painted. They are merely outlines, silhouettes made by blowing pigment over the hand onto the wall. Why they were made, we can only conjecture. We know hands are a special link in the long chain of human history. We know also that the opposed thumb is a physiological phenomenon that allows us to grasp, to understand, and to shape our world.

Documentary movies and slides made about the Paleolithic art in the ancient caves of France and Spain acquaint the students with some of the earliest human records. Readings are assigned that describe the discovery and nature of the caves. The singular nature of the hand image is the main focus of class discussion during which we compile lists of possible reasons for its presence. With these in mind, the students are asked to write a poem.

Here, again, I stress the importance of perspective. Just as in the sketching exercises, they must first discover where they are before writing. A variety of possible points of view are suggested: a Paleolithic artist, a participant in the society, a modern person. I explain how the content of the poem can be reflected in the style. I give no directions about form, rhythm, phrasing, or rhyming. I do, however, encourage them to “compress” their thoughts and let their words touch tightly together. My goal is to overcome the self-conscious inhibitions of untried poets. The image of the hand is a vehicle well suited to this end. Here the intellect and

the emotions join and create a new understanding not only of the hand, but of human history. An example of student poetry follows.

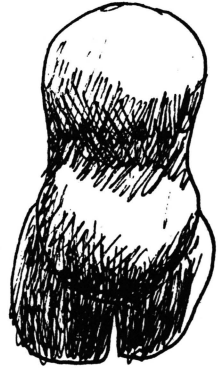
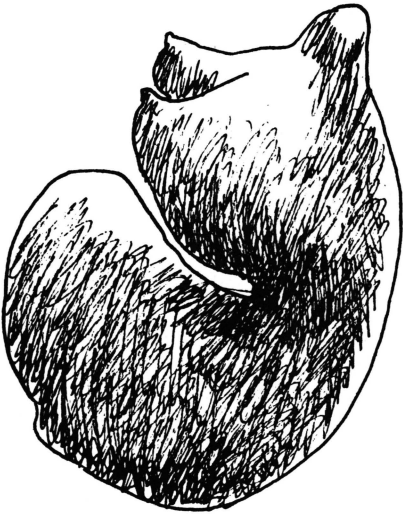
The Shadow of the Hand By Joseph McClean

Consciously I leave the shadow of my hand upon the wall.
I feel the sense of power in its presence.
I see it.
Others will see it.
It is more than just a sketch,
It is me! I have become part of the cave wall.
My sign shall endure.
Others will see it.
Yes, others will see me after I am no more.
I have great power to endure.
My shadow lives.
It has become part of the great force
That creates and controls all things.
My enemies shall fall because
My shadow lives.
I shall have immortality because
My shadow lives
In the depths of my cave.

FERTILITY FIGURE TO BRING FORTH AND TO NURTURE

This exercise begins with a visual experience of photographs and facsimiles of ancient fertility figures. These small figurines bespeak intimate human experience. They vary in size from one inch to the length of the human hand, and they differ in proportion from the voluminous “Venus of Willendorf” to the elegantly thin forms found in Mesopotamia. This variation suggests a relationship between artistic expression and societal needs. The difference between sexuality and fertility, a difficult distinction for the young, becomes a primary problem when I ask each of them to create a fertility figure for today’s society. Each person is given a handful of wet clay out of which a figure is to be formed. The only tool is the hand. The only help I offer comes if a technical problem develops; i.e. the clays dries too fast, or students need instructions in how to add on a piece of clay so that it won’t fall off when it dries. After the figurines are formed they are sketched three times, from three different points of view. This creates in many a new understanding of the three dimensional world in which we live.

Finally, students are asked to write about their figurines. I suggest that a poem on this subject might reflect the mystery of the life force. It could contain words that sustain sound and cause the mind to image in a special



way. Words like *vast* or *source* that suspend the image and allow feelings to arise might be used for inspiration. I ask for poetry because, to me, it suggests a freer form of expression, and it challenges the imagination in much the same way as clay.

Epistula Feminae Antiquae By Maura G. Whelan

Woman:

Only you can know the mystery of leading humanity from
womb to breast,
the mystery of growth, of nurture, of holding life in your belly—

Mother:

In jealousy man oppresses you,
In this way he enslaves you, by forcing that wondrous journey
from womb to breast
to become continuous,
tormenting,
murderous...

Childbearer:

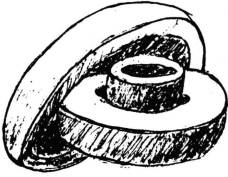
You shall not share the fruits of your mind with them.
You shall neither invade their art nor defile their temple—
Your lips shall not be gates to wisdom, concealing words
both pearllike and divine—
but only soft, curvaceous cherries, tacit symbols of your
abundant fertility—
by which you remain enthralled.

Yet, Sad Lady:

You both love and hate these children, who, through
their existence bind you into endless servitude.
You can't help adoring that last boy who burst forth from
your own flesh.
But please; do not be deceived by the infant's smile
He is not helpless; nay, he is master;
It is he who shall tomorrow oppress your daughters.

THE VESSEL: A DEDICATION

During the semester the students are instructed in how to create pottery using many different methods. For the final assignment, students select one method and make a pot in dedication to a personality from the ancient world. This pot is to be designed to contain the mythical "elixir of life" that flowed from the four holy rivers of paradise. To whoever drank of it, the elixir brought immortality. The class considers how bowls and cups have



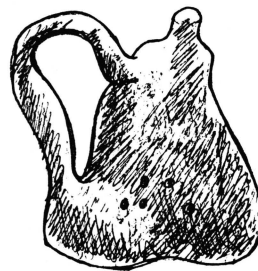
1. A small container, two inches in diameter with a hidden, secret vessel inside to hold the magic elixir.



2. A tall, thin vial with a tiny cup set into its spout from which to drink the elixir of life.



3. A thin saucer, shallow and unadorned to contain the elixir.



4. A strangely shaped form, three inches high with a handle and three tiny holes in its body but none in its spout.

been used through history, even to the present day, as trophies or rewards. I show examples of pottery used in this way, and I indicate that pottery was the first portable surface that man discovered he could write upon.

The clay pieces created in this exercise vary in size and elaboration from simple, saucer shapes to large sculptured vessels. Some of the works are surprisingly abstract, disguising their function completely.

When the containers are completed, I ask students to write their dedications. These are read to the class while the pottery is shown. With this assignment I try to join all the experiences of the course. Through the idea of the “elixir” comes the concern with mortality and the fragile nature of our lives. The choice of someone on whom to bestow immortality forces the student to examine history from a new perspective. I ask that the ancient person so rewarded be someone whose continued life would benefit our present world. To find such a person is not always possible. An example of one fruitless search can be found in the second poem below.

Dedication to Lao Tzu By David Bolnick

Many layers thick of heavy bronze plate
Splintered by the mightiest warrior's lance.
Ten thousand men die under strength unmatched,
Yet, Achilles falls like a feather to merciless time
Scarring with his sword but a scratch in vast timeless space.

Dead the crab lies on the barren beach
Stubborn to roll out with the ebbing tide.
The starfish flows with the waters, thriving.

Stand up against the mightiest force
And you are sure to perish beneath its cold edge.
Flow with the mightiest force and you may claim it as your own.
True immortality is for the man
Who heeds these words and touches his lips to this cup.

To Them That Knew and Told By Noel Beckford

In thine hands behold
The fountain of youth
The immortal drink
The elixir of life.
The truth revealed by the first of the fold,
The most uncouth,
The first of the link.
In those hands is the power to create,
To change
To deviate.

Use what is given, he cries through the ages
To ease the pain, the suffering, the strife.
But his pleas go unheeded, and slowly
It drips
The elixir of life. . .

Sometimes I ask students to wrap their pots and let the wrappings add another dimension to their presentations. Any creative action that can extend the comprehension of who we are builds vocabulary. With such forms and with words, we signal our inner meanings.

Kate Ferguson Hirsh

WRITING ABOUT THE LAW: A COMPOSITION COURSE FOR PRE-LAW STUDENTS

“Virtually every American law school adheres to the ‘case study method’.” The speaker is Scott Turow, formerly a lecturer in the English department at Stanford, who in 1974—“purely speculatively,” he told himself—took the Law School Admissions Test. Three years later, Turow had written *One L: An Inside Account of Life in the First Year at Harvard Law School*.¹ The case study method comes up early in his book, because “cases and opinions form the very center of a law student’s world.”²

Until he entered that world, says Turow, he had not been aware that much of the law is made in the courts, case by case—that is, lawsuit by lawsuit—as judges interpret legislative statutes and as they grapple with questions to which no statute affords an answer. Having reached a decision in a case, a judge may write a judicial opinion. Usually an opinion opens with a short account, in narrative form, of the dispute that brought the litigants before the court. The opinion then turns to exposition and persuasion, defining issues, summarizing the litigants’ arguments, sorting out principles of law, citing precedents—and finally proving (at least to the satisfaction of its author) that the application of particular rules dictates the present decision.

If a case is controversial, you and I may see excerpts from the opinion in our daily newspapers. Controversial or not, before long the opinion will probably appear in a case reporter, a volume bearing on its spine a title such as *563 Federal Reporter, 2d Series*, which will be placed alongside similar volumes in the rows of reporters filling the shelves of law libraries. There the opinion may be searched out by law students drafting briefs and

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¹(New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977.) p. 24.

²*Ibid.*

memoranda for their courses. Should the opinion influence development in a given area of the law, say, contracts, it may be reprinted, entirely or in part, in a casebook, the kind of text touted by law students to and from class.

Law students read, analyze, and write about judicial opinions, as Turow reports in *One L*. A course I teach at Queens College, CUNY, is designed for the undergraduate student who is eager to sample something like that law school experience. The course is English 6.2, “Writing about the Law.” Explaining why and how I have adapted the case study method to an undergraduate composition course is my aim in this paper.

At Queens, “Writing about the Law” belongs to a group of courses known as the “special” sections of English 6. These courses date from 1976, when English 6 was added to the college-wide composition requirement. That requirement had previously called for a semester, or in the case of many students, for two semesters, of introductory composition. The new requirement for an intermediate-level course included a new option. Students could elect to take either 6.0, “General Expository Writing,” or one of the sections, designated 6.1 through 6.9, offering practice in writing related to their major fields of concentration and their future careers. The special sections, which seem in the past four years to have grown steadily more popular than the general 6.0, now provide training in writing about the subjects of Business and Economics, the Medical Sciences, the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences, Art, Music, Literature, Education, and Law.

The special 6’s constitute a departure from the usual undergraduate writing course, which traditionally is taught as a skills course unrelated to any particular subject matter. While much may be said for the traditional method, its great drawback is that it cannot fully prepare students to meet the requirements of academic writing. The papers our students submit to their subject teachers are graded on content as well as on form—if anything, on content far more than on form. Yet in a traditional writing skills course, content runs a very poor second to form as students are free to write about topics—their families, their favorite records—with which their teacher is unacquainted. In such a course, content does count for something: a paper should be interesting and should have no obvious contradictions or glaring omissions. But the paper needn’t be insightful, or thorough, or even accurate, since a teacher unfamiliar with its topic is not likely to remark the absence of these qualities.

Too easily, therefore, a student in such a course may adopt this rule: to solve writing problems, sacrifice content for the sake of form. If a point, though important, proves difficult to write about, being hard to explain or hard to integrate with other points, well then—since the teacher will probably not notice—just drop it or bend it. A shrewd student who relies on this tactic may earn A’s in composition, since her clearly expressed,

smoothly organized papers will seem skillful. This student has acquired a healthy respect for, and some skill in achieving, clarity and order. But she has *not* acquired a healthy respect for accuracy and thoroughness, qualities just as important in college writing. For her composition teacher, she has been turning out papers in which content is a minor or at best a secondary consideration. She has felt no pressure to prove her knowledge of the topics she chooses to write about. She has not been composing “real” academic essays.

In an introductory composition course, needless to say, the “skills” approach is practical, perhaps necessary. But we must, I think, concede that for as long as our students are handing us papers about their families and favorite records, their training in the attributes of successful college writing is limited. They receive little or no instruction in how to treat complex material in an accurate and thorough manner, and even the lessons they do learn, about clarity, order, grammar, and usage, may have slight value unless they are taught to apply these lessons to the types of writing ordinarily assigned in a subject course.

Do students really need to be taught to make the transition from autobiographical writing to writing about texts? Can’t they make that transition on their own? Obviously some can; but in my introductory composition courses, many students stumble when taking that step. My English 1 students begin writing about their own ideas and experiences. Eventually, toward the end of a semester, I ask them to write about material in an anthology of essays, to summarize, for instance, one essay’s argument and then compare that with another—a standard academic exercise. At this point my perspective on their work changes. Because I am now familiar with their topics, I can evaluate their papers as a subject teacher might. Even the papers written by my best students may now seem sadly lacking. Typically, the analysis of an assigned essay is inaccurate and incomplete; minor points are given too much play, while major ones are missing. Paraphrasing is not only rough but halfhearted, since quoting comes easier and plagiarism is easier still. Moreover, under the pressure of assignments demanding as much attention to content as to form, writing skills mastered earlier in the term abruptly break down. Errors in grammar and punctuation, overloaded sentences, undeveloped paragraphs, lack of organization—these mistakes now reappear. Moving from the relatively modest demands of the short personal essay to the more complex operations of critical writing, many students need help that cannot be provided in a few quick classes. They need, not just another semester of composition, but a course combining the perspective of the subject teacher *and* the writing skills teacher.

At Queens, the special sections of English 6 offer students this

opportunity. In addition, each section gives students and their teacher the chance to pursue a genuine interest. Law school is the aim of most students who sign up for 6.2. My own interest in the law began in graduate school, where I did a fair amount of legal research on the topic of literary censorship. In recent years, many of my former graduate school classmates have, like Scott Turow, belatedly enrolled in law school. Their firsthand acquaintance with the “case study method” has influenced the design of my course, “Writing about the Law.”

Needless to say, my first consideration in selecting opinions for the 6.2 syllabus is that they be cast in language comprehensible to readers not trained in the law. Second, they should be concerned with issues that appeal to the interests of undergraduate students; and third, they must be capable of serving as the basis for reading and writing assignments proper to an intermediate-level composition course.

To satisfy these requirements, I look for cases dealing with constitutional rights of students in grammar school, high school, and college. Each semester I narrow the focus even further, to rights protected by a particular constitutional amendment. Thus, one term may be devoted to cases stemming from a clash between students and school authorities over the right to freedom of speech and of the press protected by the first amendment; another semester may focus on cases concerned with the right to privacy protected by the fourth amendment and possibly violated by locker and dormitory inspections and body searches of students; or the course might consider the right to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment protected by the eighth amendment and possibly violated when students are punished corporally.

Cases best suited to my lessons and assignments are those that have generated more than one opinion each, either because a disagreement among the members of a court has resulted in majority, dissenting, and concurring opinions, or because a dissatisfied litigant has pressed an appeal to a higher court. In a given semester, my students might work with about ten opinions arising from perhaps four cases. Included in the group will be at least one opinion stating a major decision in our area of constitutional law and other opinions arising from a case either recently in the news or local in origin, or, with luck, both.

One semester, for example, when the focus of the course was on rights protected by the first amendment, we began with *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U. S. 503 (1969), a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. In that case, high school and junior high school students had been suspended after refusing to remove the black armbands they wore to express their opposition to the war in Viet Nam. Justice Fortas, speaking for the majority, vigorously upheld the right to

free expression in school; Justice Black vehemently dissented. We ended the semester with several opinions arising from a suit brought by the editor of the student newspaper at New York City's Stuyvesant High School against school officials who had banned a proposed survey and newspaper article about student attitudes toward sex. In *Trachtman v. Anker*, 426 F. Supp. 198 (1976), Judge Motley explained why the ban was in part constitutionally permissible and in part impermissible, concluding that 11th and 12th graders—though not 9th and 10th graders—should receive the questionnaires and have their anonymous replies published in the school newspaper. A year later the judgment of the trial court was reversed by the U.S. Court of Appeals. In *Trachtman v. Anker*, 563 F. 2d 512 (1977), the majority opinion asserted that the ban was proper in its entirety, while the dissent found the ban utterly unacceptable, a violation of the first amendment rights of all students at Stuyvesant High.

“It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” So wrote Justice Fortas in *Tinker*, adding, “This has been the unmistakable holding of the Court for almost 50 years.”³ In fact, however, virtually all of the leading judicial decisions on the constitutional rights of students have come in the ten years since *Tinker*. Case by case, the courts are still defining the constitutional protections to which students are entitled. The evolving case law is especially newsworthy because of its potential effect on every American community. Information about current cases usable in 6.2 often appears in the daily and weekly press, notably *The New York Times* and Nat Hentoff's column in *The Village Voice*. For a comprehensive view of the issues involved in the application of a particular amendment to public school students, I have drawn repeatedly on a 1976 publication, *The Constitutional Rights of Students: Analysis and Litigation Materials for the Student's Lawyer*,⁴ which, notwithstanding its title and quite apart from its usefulness to a course such as mine, should be of interest to teachers generally.

Getting hold of a published opinion isn't hard if one has access to a law library. A librarian can explain how to locate the opinion in a reporter and how to look up subsequent cases making reference to it. Pertinent earlier cases are cited in the opinion itself. Preceding the text of an opinion are headnotes supplied by the publisher of the report volume. Typically, headnotes state the key facts in a case, list the legal issues raised, summarize

³p. 506.

⁴ed. P.M. Lines (Cambridge, Mass. : Center for Law and Education).

the court's reasoning and conclusions—and thus perform tasks I may plan to assign in 6.2. My usual procedure, therefore, is to make a copy of the entire opinion, cut away and save the headnotes, and recopy the opinion for distribution in class. Also, my practice is to hand out copies of only one opinion at a time, so that if, for example, my students are to summarize the argument of one opinion, they will not be tempted to lean on a subsequent opinion that happens to perform that very task. Later on, we may compare their work with the summary in the second opinion or with the one originally supplied in the headnotes. By the end of a term my students have received a total of perhaps 50 or 60 pages copied from reporters, for which they pay a small copying fee. Their other purchase is a composition handbook; at present, we use Frederick Crews' *The Random House Handbook*.⁵

During our first class, my students and I talk about the case study method of American law schools and define the terms "case" and "judicial opinion." I point out that a course in law school typically deals with scores of cases and covers a broad range of issues, whereas our course will focus on just a few cases involving issues that are limited in number and closely related; that even so, a question we can't answer may come up now and then; but they will find, in our group of judicial opinions, all the information needed for a knowledgeable response to my writing assignments. Writing not only well but knowledgeably is to be their aim in 6.2. We talk about the relative ease of writing autobiographically, as most of them did in English 1, and the more difficult task of writing an academic paper about material in which the teacher is well versed. To a teacher grading such a paper, we observe, content is at least as important as form. So it will be in our course, I explain. Except for the first paper, all writing assignments will be based on the opinions we read and analyze. Accuracy and thoroughness in the treatment of this material will influence their grades quite as much as will sound organization, clear style, and correct grammar and usage.

My students do write an autobiographical paper at the start of a term. This paper gives me an early indication of their basic writing skills. Because of its topic, it also serves as an informal introduction to issues with which the course will be concerned. Clashes of the kind dealt with in *Tinker* and *Trachtman* are not rare or remote from daily life. On the contrary, all young people have had comparable experiences. All have had their speech

⁵Second Edition (New York: Random House, 1977).

or expression, or their access to material and information, censored, usually by a parent or a school authority. Accordingly, if 6.2 is to focus on the first amendment, I ask my students to start off by writing about a personal brush with censorship. Similarly, were the course to focus on the fourth amendment or on the eighth, I would ask for a paper about an invasion of their privacy or about a punishment meted out to them at home or at school. In form, the first paper is a persuasive essay that (1) begins with a narrative account of a specific action taken by a parent or a school authority, and then (2) shows why the action was “right” or “wrong,” “justified” or “unjustified”—a judgment to be based not on legal considerations but on principles ordinarily applicable to the behavior of parents and children, of school authorities and students. Identifying the relevant principles and showing how they apply to a specific situation are tasks for each paper’s author. Allowing for certain differences, these tasks can be likened to what is done in a judicial opinion. Around mid-semester, when the class has become familiar with the analytical and persuasive methods typically employed in opinions, I ask for revised versions of the first papers. Often the transformation is remarkable: facts not pertinent to a final conclusion will be cut from the narrative section, while relevant facts will be added; principles of judgment will be better expressed and applied to the facts more carefully; counter-arguments previously ignored will be weighed and rebutted. A distinction glossed over in the original version may now become central; for example, a student whose reading was censored by a parent may newly distinguish between the parent’s aims and methods, endorsing the former while deploring the latter.

Copies of the first opinion are distributed at the end of the first class. I ask everyone to go through the opinion at home, looking up the meaning of any unfamiliar word. Terms such as “appellant” and “certiorari” are defined in a standard dictionary. When supplementary information about the meaning of a term would be helpful, I draw on *Black’s Law Dictionary*,⁶ but this is rarely necessary.

The next few classes are devoted to reading and discussing the first opinion. If my students are at all daunted by the language of the text, the cause is apt to be not legal jargon, but the deceptive simplicity of a passage such as the following, from *Tinker*:

[A student] may express his opinions, even on controversial subjects like the conflict in Vietnam, if he does so without “materially and substantially

⁶Henry Campbell Black, Rev., Fourth Edition (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1968).

interfering with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school” and without colliding with the rights of others. But conduct by the student, in the class or out of it, which for any reason—whether it stems from time, place, or type of behavior—materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others is, of course, not immunized by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech.⁷

This passage illustrates one of the chief characteristics of legal writing, which is, as David Mellinkoff observes in *The Language of the Law*, the “deliberate use of words and expressions with flexible meanings.”⁸ The law, notes Mellinkoff, “is not an exact science, and its language must share some of the ambiguity of life.”⁹ Precision is not always possible or desirable. Reading *Tinker*, my students would come to see that in the passage I have quoted, Justice Fortas used abstract and general language deliberately, to formulate a principle applicable to future cases as well as to the one then current. They would see also that abstract and general language requires careful interpretation. “Material disruption,” “substantial disorder,” “invasion of the rights of others”—what do these phrases mean? To what types of “free speech” activity by students would the phrases apply? These and similar questions would be tackled in class during a semester that began with *Tinker* and ended with *Trachtman*. First we would analyze the use of significant “flexible” phrases in *Tinker* itself, noting their application to the specific facts of that case. Turning to opinions which invoke the *Tinker* standard, we would compare and contrast subsequent interpretations of the same language. Definition, interpretation, the interplay of general and specific, abstract and concrete—paying attention to such matters does not seem pedantic to my students in 6.2. They see that questions about meaning can have real life consequences. The students who brought suit in *Tinker* were victorious partly because the key word “disruption” was interpreted by the court in a physical sense. In *Trachtman*, partly because the same word was understood to embrace a psychological meaning, students lost.

My next writing assignment comes after the in-class analysis of *Tinker*. Handing out copies of a second opinion—say, Justice Black’s dissent—I ask my students to read and analyze the opinion on their own and then, using their own words and sentence structure, to summarize the author’s argument, stating (1) the conclusion reached in the opinion and (2) the

⁷p. 513.

⁸Boston: Little, Brown, 1963) p. 11.

⁹*Op. cit.* p. 394.

main grounds on which the conclusion rests. I ask for two summaries from each student, one limited to about 200 words, the other three times as long. Both summaries are to cover the same main points. In one, however, the treatment of the points will necessarily be cursory, while in the other it should be detailed. Calling for a short and a long summary of the same argument helps to focus attention on the nature of thoroughness in academic writing. My students see that the concept is relative, having bounds fixed partly by the terms of an assignment—less is expected of the 200-word summary—and partly by their subject, since the number of main points to be covered in both summaries depends on the number in the assigned opinion; in Black's there are three or four.

Later I distribute copies of a few representative summaries. First we evaluate their clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness. Invariably spotted, and tackled in revision, are the following: (1) erroneous or unclear paraphrasing of the assigned text, (2) presentation of minor points as if they were major, (3) the omission of major points, (4) an admixture of personal commentary by the summarizer.

In addition to clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness, we evaluate the summaries for conciseness. Students will insist that they had to omit major points because of the prescribed word limit. When choosing short summaries to be analyzed in class, I include, therefore, at least one that by being concise has managed to cover all main points, and others that are incomplete and verbose. The latter we rewrite in class, making room for the missing points by eliminating wordiness. We also look at pairs of summaries, short and long, noting that the length of the second summary is due in some instances to added information but in others to verbal padding.

I would deal with conciseness in any writing course, since this quality is one of the more easily learned attributes of good style. I give it extra attention in 6.2, however, in accordance with the emphasis placed on it by those whose concern is good legal style. "Omit Surplus Words"¹⁰ is the first rule in Richard C. Wydick's "Plain English for Lawyers" (*California Law Review* 66 [July 1978]: 727-756), an article containing suggestions and exercises I have found useful. Though geared to a law school writing course, Henry Weihofen's *Legal Writing Style*¹¹ has sections relevant to the aims of 6.2, including a chapter on conciseness.

¹⁰p. 729.

¹¹(St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing, 1961.)

Verbosity accounts for the missing major points in many summaries. To echo a familiar refrain, “something’s gotta give” when a wordy style meets a prescribed word limit. In the case of other summaries, however, that omission, together with undue emphasis on minor points, stems from faulty reading and analysis of the assigned opinion. The summarizers just didn’t see which points were major. Students entering 6.2 are unused to taking content seriously in a writing course, and some will have missed the major points simply for lack of effort; next time they need only look harder. Other students need to be taught how to spot main points. They require training not only in language but in the process of thought and the structure of argument. A carefully composed text provides verbal signals—topic sentences, transitions, repetition of key words, and so on—corresponding to steps in the author’s argument. Good readers spot the signals not only because they are responsive to language, but because they bring to the text a highly developed sense of the elements standard in argument. Facts, issues, premises, inferences, conclusions, conditions, exceptions—a reader who is slow to recognize such components of arguments will glide unseeingly, uncritically, passively, over the verbal signals associated with them. In 6.2 many classes are spent in analyzing the argumentative structure of the opinions we read. Typical of questions raised in class are these: What is the persuasive purpose of this sentence, this paragraph? Is the author stating facts? Adopting a premise? Reaching a conclusion? Similar questions, of course, could be asked of an “ordinary” essay. But judicial opinions are especially suited to this form of instruction, because each is, or aims to be, a logical, reasoned argument, and because the structure of argument remains similar from opinion to opinion.

After a few assignments in summarization, my students begin to write comparison and contrast papers. I might ask them to identify and discuss two main points of disagreement between two opinions in the same case—say, the majority and dissenting opinions of one court, or the contrary opinions of a lower and a higher court. I might ask for three points of agreement between three opinions. Organization now becomes our primary concern. We outline. For example, we outline and weigh the pro’s and con’s of two possible arrangements, the point-by-point plan:

- Point #1 is
- Says Opinion A
- Says Opinion B
- Point #2 is
- Says Opinion A
- Says Opinion B

And the opinion-by-opinion plan:

Says Opinion A,
 On point #1
 On point #2
Says Opinion B,
 On point #1
 On point #2

We would note that the second plan is more likely to result in either repetition or incomplete comparison. Outlining, though generally unpopular in composition courses, is vital in law school, which makes it easy to sell in 6.2.

Outlining introduces the topic of parallelism. We examine this principle of construction in outlines, in papers, in paragraphs, in sentences. Parallelism, like conciseness, is something I emphasize in 6.2. Writing about the law very often requires a parallel statement of causes, conditions, rules, and the like, as my students discover when reading opinions. Constructing parallel sentences calls for knowledge of grammar and punctuation, and so we begin reviewing these matters early in the term. During this review and while working on parallelism we make use of *The Random House Handbook* and also of illustrations and exercises geared specifically to legal writing, material which I gather in bits and pieces from Weihofen's *Legal Writing* and like sources.

Toward the end of a term my students are writing formal persuasive essays in response to assignments that are modeled on the standard law school examination question. In *Legal Writing: the Strategy of Persuasion* by Norman Brand and John O. White¹² and in Irving Younger's chapter on examinations in *Looking at Law School*,¹³ there are full accounts of the design of such a question and the techniques to be used in answering one. As Brand and White say, "a law examination consists of an essay question offering a hypothetical fact situation and calling for an analysis."¹⁴ The hypothetical fact situation is related to the actual disputes resolved by the courts in cases the law student has read. A typical hypothetical might end with an instruction like this: "Mr. Smith (a party to the imaginary dispute) has asked you to represent him in court. Discuss the arguments you would

¹²(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

¹³Stephen Gillers, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1977).

¹⁴*Op. cit.* p. 3.

raise in his behalf.” In response, drawing on her knowledge of actual cases, the law student would extract pertinent facts from the hypothetical situation, would identify the issues arising from these facts, and would apply the appropriate legal principles. “Apply” is the key word. In his chapter on examinations, Younger urges the law student to remember this “single most important point”: that she is “not being tested solely on knowledge of the subject matter of the course.”¹⁵ Being tested also are (1) her ability to analyze, (2) her ability to organize, and (3) her ability to express her thoughts.

Similarly, my last assignments in 6.2 call upon these three skills while demanding knowledge of the course’s subject matter, that is, of our group of judicial opinions. One semester, when that group included the *Tinker* and *Trachtman* opinions, I drew up a hypothetical problem roughly similar to the facts in *Trachtman* but differing from those facts in several significant respects. According to the hypothetical, the staff of a high school newspaper planned to publish the results of a questionnaire which asked students to rate their teachers and courses. The “fact situation” gave details about the planned questionnaire—where and when it would be distributed, what questions would be asked, and so forth—and also about school procedures, mentioning, for instance, that only seniors could choose their courses. The high school principal vetoed the plan, claiming it would interfere with school discipline and invade the rights of teachers. My students were instructed to compose an argument supporting either the students or the principal; grounds for each position were provided in the opinions we had read. This argument they wrote carefully at home. A second hypothetical, shorter and simpler, was answered in class, as practice for taking an essay exam under time pressure. Tips on dealing with that pressure are included in Younger’s chapter.

By now, many of my former 6.2 students have gone off to law school. Each semester a few return for a talk with my current class. Speaking with the wisdom of hindsight they weigh the merits, for a pre-law student, of the various majors and courses offered at Queens. Invariably they recommend writing courses. Their conclusion that “Writing about the Law” is particularly helpful makes my work, each semester, much easier. It goes without saying that my adaptation of the case study method is an extreme simplification of the standard law school regimen. Still, the course does give students a taste of what lies ahead when, as Turow reports, cases and opinions will “form the very center” of their world. The reading and writing

¹⁵*Op. cit.* p. 147.

tasks assigned in 6.2 resemble, however modestly, the work done in law school. The qualities my students aim for in their papers—accuracy, thoroughness, clarity, order, correct grammar and usage—are the attributes of good legal writing.

Yet preparing students for law school is not the main purpose of English 6.2. Indeed, each semester some of my students decide not to be lawyers. Their time has not been wasted, however, since the training that would have been useful in law school will serve them well in their remaining years at Queens. To provide training in sound academic writing is the real purpose of all the special sections of English 6. We who teach these courses are primarily concerned with the writing our students must do as undergraduates. Much of our work could be described as reinforcement of lessons taught in English 1. But it is, I believe, our common experience that the special 6's are popular largely because they look to the future, not to the past. At Queens, the general 6.0 is perceived by disgruntled students as a mere repetition of English 1. In fact the two courses are quite different; but admittedly, between English 1 and the special 6's there is a far clearer contrast. That contrast, the sense of something new and different—something linked, moreover, to life beyond college—is one reason for the success of the specialized writing course.

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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: December 15, 1980.

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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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