TEACHING THE COLLEGE FRESHMAN TO WRITE

APPROVED:

Mary Evelyn Whitten  
Major Professor

W. L. Mahlgang  
Minor Professor

E. S. Clifton  
Director of the Department of English

Robert B. Toulon    
Dean of the Graduate School
TEACHING THE COLLEGE FRESHMAN TO WRITE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Pamela Matheidas Harris, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1969
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. INTERESTING CONTENT</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SOUND REASONING</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. ORGANIZING ACCORDING TO PURPOSE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DEMON ERRORS</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. MATURITY OF STYLE</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As enrollments grow and budgets strain, English departments are hiring increasing numbers of inexperienced teachers, particularly graduate students, to teach freshman English. These novices are expected to be competent in teaching students how to write well. But more often than not the teacher faces a dilemma: he is asked to teach a course for which he is untrained; he is ordinarily better prepared to teach literature than composition. Almost all of his English courses have been in literature. Possibly he has had a semester of linguistics or the history of the English language, but even these courses will not prepare him for all the problems of teaching composition. Although as an English major he has probably written many papers, he has likely never thought much about teaching others how to write.

Many institutions of higher learning, such as North Texas State University, cope with this problem by offering a course for graduate teachers in the special problems of teaching freshman composition. Taken while the graduate student is teaching, this course provides for in-service training of the inexperienced teacher. But the
inexperienced teacher needs to know—he needs to know before he enters the classroom—what he should teach, what is actually involved in the teaching of composition.

In order to determine what points are emphasized by experienced teachers of composition, a questionnaire was sent out to the English department heads of all senior state colleges and universities in Texas. The questions concerned only the first semester of freshman English because this semester usually deals directly with writing. The theories and teaching problems of the second semester vary: to teach or not to teach a research paper, to teach or not to teach literature. Of the twenty-two colleges and universities which were sent a questionnaire, twenty replied:

- Angelo State College
- East Texas State University
- Lamar State College
- Midwestern University
- North Texas State University
- Pan American College
- Sam Houston State College
- Southwest Texas State College
- Stephen F. Austin State College
- Sul Ross State College
- Tarleton State College
- Texas Agricultural and Industrial University
- Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University
- Texas Southern University
- Texas Technological College
- Texas Woman's University
- University of Houston
- University of Texas at Arlington
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Texas at El Paso

The questions asked and the answers received were as follows:
1. Has your department considered abolishing the first semester of freshman English?

   Yes  4
   No    13
   Other  3

Why or why not?

Among those answering yes, three believe that the students should be taught to write in high school. The other respondent replies that his department has considered abolishing the first semester of freshman English as a required course and replacing it with an examination.

Of those responding that no abolition has been considered, five indicate that they do offer advanced placement or exemption from the course for the better students. The others answer that all students, even the better ones, benefit from the course.

The three respondents giving other answers say that individuals within their departments have spoken of abolishing this course, but that the departments as a whole have not considered it.

2. What texts are used for first-semester freshman English?

   Handbooks

   Eight institutions are using either Gorrell and Laird's Modern English Handbook or Hodges and Whitten's
Harbrace College Handbook. Another eight use these four: Baker's The Complete Stylist, McCrimmon's Writing With a Purpose, Perrin's Writer's Guide and Index to English, and Willis's Structure, Style, and Usage. The other colleges and universities have made different, individual choices, such as Kierzek and Gibson's The Macmillan Handbook of English and Elsbree and Bracher's Heath's College Handbook of Composition. Supplementary texts, such as workbooks or programmed vocabulary and spelling texts, are required by some institutions.

Readers

Only two institutions agree on a reader: Beal and Korg's Thought in Prose. The other institutions are using twenty-nine different, separate texts, ranging from Black Voices to Toward a Liberal Education, from Seven Centuries of Verse to A Writing Apprenticeship, from Patterns of Exposition to A Guide to Literature Study, from Introduction to the Study of Literature to The English Language: An Introduction.

3. Approximately how many themes is a student required to write in the semester?

Two of the respondents say that the student writes at least six themes. Two other respondents answer that the student writes as many as fourteen themes. The
other respondents indicate that the student writes from eight to ten themes during the semester.

4. Are students usually assigned themes dealing with personal experiences?
   
   |   |   |   |   |   |
   | 2 | Yes |
   | 11| No  |
   | 1 | No Answer |
   | 6 | Other |

   Three of the respondents giving other answers say that these topics are assigned 50 per cent of the time; the other three answer that some instructors assign them and some do not.

5. Are students usually assigned themes dealing with solving controversial social, economic, and political problems?
   
   |   |   |   |   |   |
   | 6 | Yes |
   | 7 | No  |
   | 1 | No Answer |
   | 6 | Other |

   Of the respondents giving other answers, three explain that students are assigned these topics half of the time; the remaining three answer that the topics are assigned occasionally.

6. Does your department give a final departmental theme for first-semester freshman English?
   
   |   |   |   |
   | 7 | Yes |
   | 13| No  |
7. Does your syllabus recommend a complete reading of a handbook?

- 5 Yes
- 11 No
- 1 No Answer
- 3 Other

If not, what sections are deleted?

Of those respondents answering no, many do not indicate what sections are deleted. Three reply that the section on the research paper is not assigned. Three answer that the handbook is used only as a reference book.

Two of those giving other answers say this matter is left to the teacher; the other replies that no handbook is used.

8. Is any class time devoted to oral compositions?

- 3 Yes
- 14 No
- 3 No Answer

9. Does your department emphasize the writing of the whole composition rather than the writing of the paragraph?

- 14 Yes
- 0 No
- 1 No Answer
- 5 Other
Among those answering yes, three indicate that some time is devoted to studying the paragraph.

Two of those respondents giving other answers say that the emphasis varies with the instructor; the other three reply that the course progresses from paragraph to theme.

10. When evaluating compositions, does your department emphasize content rather than mechanical correctness?

   6 Yes
   4 No
    7 Both
   1 No Answer
   2 Other

The two respondents giving other answers reply that this emphasis varies with the instructor.

11. Is any class time devoted to formal logic?

   12 Yes
   5 No
    2 No Answer
    1 Other

The one respondent replies that this choice is made by the individual instructor.

12. Is outlining always required for students' compositions?

   5 Yes
   7 No
Among those giving comments, three indicate that some form of planning is required of students, although formal outlines are not. Another states that outlining is required for some compositions. Three say requiring outlines varies with the instructor.

13. Does your department emphasize the mechanical and grammatical correctness rather than the organization of a composition?

   0  Yes
   10  No
   6  Both
   1  No Answer
   3  Other

Among those answering no, one indicates that students' compositions must be standard mechanically in order to be given a passing grade.

Of the respondents giving other answers, two reply that this emphasis varies with the instructor; the other replies that compositions are given two grades: one for mechanics and one for organization and content.

14. Is a great amount of class time (40 or 50 per cent) spent in the discussion of grammar?
Among those answering no, one indicates that the instructor has individual conferences with the student to discuss problems in grammar. Another replies that the instructor uses class time when he feels it is necessary.

The two respondents giving other answers say that this matter is left to the discretion of the individual instructor.

15. Are students required to do grammatical exercises out of class?

Among those answering yes, one says that grammatical exercises are assigned in 50 per cent of the classes.

Among those answering no, two write that exercises are assigned occasionally.

Of those respondents giving other answers, one replies that some exercises are given; another writes that exercises are given in perhaps 15 per cent of the classes; four indicate that this requirement varies with the instructor.
16. Are spelling tests given in your freshman English course?

   4  Yes
   12 No
   1  No Answer
   3  Other

The three respondents giving other answers reply that this choice is left to the teacher. If so, from where do the spelling lists come?

Four respondents indicate that the lists come from handbooks. One says that lists are compiled from the reading material. Another replies that the lists come from compositions written by students.

17. What mechanical and grammatical errors usually appear in consistently failing papers?

Twenty-one specific grammatical and mechanical errors are listed. Those errors listed most frequently are sentence fragments, comma splices, fused sentences, subject-verb disagreement, and misspelled words.

18. Is a great amount of class time (40 or 50 per cent) spent in rhetorical analysis of literature?

   9  Yes
   8  No
   1  No Answer
   2  Other
The two respondents giving other answers reply that this type of approach varies with the instructor.

Summary

The questionnaire indicates that freshman English will probably continue to be offered in the curriculums of Texas colleges and universities; 80 per cent of the institutions replying have not officially considered abolishing it. The inexperienced teacher who is often given the task of teaching college freshmen to write usually wants to know what major aspects of writing should be stressed. According to the replies given by experienced teachers responding to the questionnaire, these five areas of composition are of major importance: interesting content, sound reasoning, organized writing, mechanical and grammatical correctness, and maturity of style. The value of interesting content is emphasized by 69 per cent of the institutions replying; 61 per cent indicate that formal logic is taught in first-semester freshman English. Although opinion regarding requiring outlines for compositions is divided, 80 per cent of the department heads emphasize the organization or the planning of the composition. In spite of the fact that more than 50 per cent reply that grammar is not usually taught in class, grammatical and mechanical errors continue to fail compositions. Finally, 47 per cent of the respondents indicate that the teaching of rhetoric is stressed in their institutions.
These five points of emphasis—content, logic, organization, demon errors, and style—are the aspects of composition that this thesis will deal with. Not a complete manual for teaching freshman composition, this thesis will serve as a simplified guide. For example, not all the grammatical and mechanical errors committed by students will be discussed: only those serious ones which department chairmen report will fail students' compositions. This thesis is written for the inexperienced teacher of freshman English who may need guidance, but it should also be of interest to the experienced teacher who wants to confirm his own practices or to find new approaches for teaching the college freshman how to write.
CHAPTER II

INTERESTING CONTENT

Content is ordinarily defined by English teachers as "saying something" about a subject. But there is a difference between content that merely fills the required length of the paper and content that impresses the reader. "Good content" is what the teacher considers worthwhile. In order to strengthen the content of compositions, teachers should strive to be careful in making assignments, to motivate the student so that he is receptive to these assignments, to show him how to handle assignments effectively, and to help him write strong introductions and conclusions.

Good content often springs from carefully made writing assignments. The report given by the Commission on English in *Freedom and Discipline in English* explains:

> The assignments must be difficult enough to make the student reach higher than he thought he could and stimulating enough to make him want to write. Haphazard assignments, flung out as the bell rings, are an invitation to false and superficial response. Making good ones is an art, and the art has principles that can be quite specifically stated.¹

If the student is asked to write about his trip to New York, he probably will write superficially, neither caring what he

---

says about the subject nor learning much from doing it. If
the student is asked to write about theories of cost accounting,
he may be frustrated by the complexities of the idea. Even if
the student does have a knowledge of the theories, he may still
be frustrated by an English teacher who does not know enough
about cost accounting to appreciate his content. The
Commission on English observes that the student must care
about what he says in order for his reader to care:
The assignment must therefore touch the outer
dge of the student's knowledge and invite him
to go further, and it must guarantee that going
further will give him the chance of discovering
something he did not know before.
To provide that invitation and guarantee
that discovery, a good assignment furnishes data
to start from. . . . A good assignment may take
the form of, or be construable into, a proposition.
The teacher may present an interesting fact, such as "iron
pills are fatal to children." This statement can serve as
a springboard for the investigation of other little-known
facts. Or the teacher may give two contradictory statements,
such as "Haste makes waste" and "He who hesitates is lost."
The exploration of inconsistency may be the basis of the
discovery of ideas. The data or the idea that the teacher
gives may be in the form of a proposition, such as "Be it
resolved that freshman English should be abolished." Or, as
Bertrand Evans suggests, the idea may be given as an idea

\[2\] Ibid., p. 93.  
\[3\] Ibid., pp. 93-94.
statement: "There are no legitimate reasons for abolishing freshman English." Giving the assignment in one of these forms immediately calls for the student's attacking or defending the subject, giving him a viewpoint to write about.

The Commission on English further suggests that the teacher's assignment limit both form and content of the student's essay, probably by giving the student a thesis statement or an outline to work from. Controlling the assignment to this extent may be particularly effective at the beginning of the course. John E. Jordan, however, points out the flaws involved in giving the student too much help in all theme assignments, saying that "writing assignments should not regularly be do-it-yourself kits with all necessary parts provided, so that anyone can assemble them with no previous experience and no test instruments--no tools required except a pen!" The teacher should give thought-provoking assignments but should not habitually shape the development of the ideas of students. The student should soon learn to organize and develop his ideas without much help from the teacher.


5Commission on English, pp. 94-95.

No matter how diligently the teacher prepares an assignment, he must still present it in a way that elicits a worthwhile response from the student. The teacher may not always get this kind of response from the students who are only attending the course because it is required. Porter G. Perrin believes that a student can make any subject interesting; he only has to get curious enough about it to make it interesting to himself and to his reader. S. Leonard Rubinstein believes that the student may have something worthwhile to say if he is given an intense desire to say it:

An essay responds to the need or desire of its writer. I can establish, for a student, need. He needs to write because I say so. But I hate to read the essay he writes: he writes what he thinks I would write. And he is always wrong. Both he and I are wasted. We must transform need into desire. Somewhere my assignment must become his investigation; otherwise, his essay will be neither profitable nor bearable to read. I must want to hear what he has to tell me; he must want to tell me something. Each desire exists if the other does.

This desire to share ideas may be created by placing the student in the position of teaching the instructor. In this reversal of positions, the teacher strikes a pose as one who is both ignorant and curious. By displaying inquisitiveness himself, the teacher can arouse the curiosity that Perrin

---


8 S. Leonard Rubinstein, "From Need to Desire," College English, XXIX (November, 1967), 125.
suggests the student should have; "the student learns from the desire to teach."^9

According to Charles Deemer, a follower of Marshall McLuhan, the student may not be receptive because he has been continually trained to be passive in the classroom. Up to now, the activities in the classroom have been the knowledge-giving teacher spoon-feeding the student who has not been thinking or "experiencing" much at all. Deemer suggests that the teacher shock the student into thinking through a "happening," such as the teacher's climbing through the window as the bell rings or sitting in the back of the room as he lectures. Deemer contends that so "long as there is reverence for the student and the process of education, no shock is too great."^10 If the student is shocked into thinking, he may discover he has something to say.

On the other hand, Steven Carter suggests that the teacher work with the student's passiveness, which can be seen as "cliches of thought or institutions."^11 The student has come to accept a certain idea, such as "conformity,"

^9 Ibid., p. 127.


because it represents the considered—or congealed—opinions of others.\textsuperscript{12} But the student may not actually believe in conformity; it exists for him only if he has conformed when he felt he should not—when he creates conformity by conforming. In having the student question his passiveness, the teacher may "create the change in thought that will produce the change in writing."\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to creating the proper atmosphere, the teacher may discover that the student is still at a loss in treating his subject interestingly. James M. McCrimmon writes, "What makes a composition interesting is not the uniqueness of the subject but the originality of the treatment."\textsuperscript{14} Paul Roberts gives some advice to the student who wishes to make his subject interesting and original. The student "should avoid the obvious content."\textsuperscript{15} Writing down all the ideas which come to his mind about a particular subject, the student can then throw them away—everyone else in the class will use these trite, ordinary ideas also. The student can choose to "take the less usual side" of a subject.\textsuperscript{16}

If the student is assigned an essay on marriage, for instance,

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid. \textsuperscript{13}Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 409.
he may wish to write about how to avoid matrimony. When the student chooses to give a minority opinion, he will have to defend that opinion, probably stating not only a stronger but also a more interesting case. Taking a stand that most people would avoid applies also when the student chooses one of several subjects; he should choose the less usual title. The student should "slip out of abstraction," Roberts continues. 17 Using facts, details, examples, and illustrations, the student avoids dullness by using specifics to convince his reader. If he is writing about student riots, he should not say, in five hundred words, that it is a problem that needs consideration. Rather, he should describe students breaking windows at Berkeley, sitting in the Dean's office at Columbia, destroying computers and files at Montreal. If the student will take Paul Robert's advice in approaching a subject, he can sharpen the content of his compositions while dealing with many different topics.

When the student writes about personal experiences, however, he may face a special problem: he may never have thought much about an emotion or an experience, or at least not deeply enough to describe one in five-hundred words. The teacher must be able in some instances to teach the student to be aware of his own feelings. In training the student to observe his world, William W. Heath gives a series

17 Ibid., p. 410.
of assignments which are directed toward this goal. In the first assignment, the student is asked to write about his feelings during a particular experience. After he has attempted to describe his reactions, the student may often find that he has had little to say about his feelings but that he has described the setting fairly well. In the second assignment, the student tries to explain why he has not described his reactions; in a third assignment he is asked to explain precisely how he will make note of his feelings in the future.\(^{18}\)

In addition to awakening inner response, the teacher should explain to the student how to attract the attention of his reader through a strong beginning. The student need not write a formal introduction; he may begin with the first point he wishes to make (the first point of his outline) or with his thesis statement. But the student needs to phrase that first point in such a way that it will arouse the interest of his reader. As John M. Kierzek and Walker Gibson suggest, the student should word his thesis statement or first point to show that it is an important observation, worth the reader's effort to continue the essay.\(^{19}\)


and Gibson give an example of an opening statement by quoting from E. Woolridge's essay, "Man's Mysterious Memory Machine":

Few scientific developments could surpass in importance a determination of how the brain achieves its remarkable results. A detailed explanation is undoubtedly many years away. However, in the laboratories of life scientists and the operating rooms of brain surgeons, important discoveries are beginning to penetrate the mystery.  

James B. Conant, in an essay on athletics, points up the importance of his subject by beginning this way, by giving his thesis statement in the first paragraph:

A realistic discussion of the place of athletics in our educational program is long overdue. There is in both our schools and colleges today a vicious overemphasis on competitive athletics. Such overemphasis is seriously destructive of our entire educational system.  

Winston Weathers and Otis Winchester point out other ways to phrase this direct approach in beginning an essay:

(1) The short, simple sentence, the direct opening. (Murder was Capone's business.)  
(2) The loose, multiclauensed sentence, a rather high-flown opening. (Murder was a business that Capone had developed into the dimensions of a big American corporation.)  
(3) The sentence beginning with a short modifying word, phrase, or clause, a rather standard, general opening. (Gold and calculating, Capone made murder his business.)  
(4) The sentence beginning with a long phrase or clause, a smooth-flowing and serious, even at times dramatic, opening. (Having made

---

20 Ibid.  
murder his business, Capone developed a strong, affluent empire in the underworld.)

When the student chooses to have a formal introduction, he does not immediately begin with the development of his subject; he appeals indirectly to the interests of his reader, making sure that the introductory material is closely related to his subject. The student may make his subject relevant to his reader by beginning with a reference to some common experience. In fact, Paul Roberts uses this very technique to introduce his advice to students who have dull content in their essays:

It's Friday afternoon, and you have almost survived another week of classes. You are just looking forward dreamily to the week end when the English instructor says: "For Monday you will turn in a five-hundred word composition on college football."^23

A second way for the student to interest his reader is by giving an unusual fact to introduce his subject, as Ralph Nader does in his essay, "The Safe Car You Can't Buy":

The Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory has developed an exhibition automobile embodying over sixty new safety concepts which would enable an occupant to withstand a head-on collision at 50 mph with at most only minor scratches.^24

---


A third way to begin an essay is for the student to use the "straw-man" technique. The student gives a proposition which he will disprove. An example for this approach is given by Edmond C. Arnold, when he disproves a belief held by advertisers:

Many advertisers have the belief that headlines or blocks of copy on a diagonal will capture attention. Actually, this is not so.25

Yet another way to begin is to use an anecdote. George Wiswell sets the scene for a discussion of "Why Men Fall in Love" in his first paragraph:

Consider, for a moment, the plight of man on the other side of the room. Until this moon-smitten moment he was, as far as the world could see, a stalwart male, capable of functioning rationally in his business and personal life, outwardly content and, perhaps, with a weather eye out for the casual companionship, accustomed to accepting what windfalls blew his way. Or maybe he thought he was happily married.

Now abruptly, he sees a girl. The girl.26

Just as the student need not have a formal introduction, he does not have to give a formal conclusion either. Many times, the student who does write a formal conclusion makes an inept summary of the points that he has made in his theme, tacking on repetitious statements which add nothing to the paper. Lee J. Martin suggests that the student can avoid this tendency if he will always conclude with an

26 Hogins and Yarber, p. 241.
emphatic last sentence in which he restates the central idea of his paper.\textsuperscript{27} An example of this technique is the final sentence of Ian Stevenson's essay on prejudice. He repeats the central idea of the work—that children are taught to be prejudiced by their parents:

> But since prejudice against members of a minority group or the peoples of other countries is a luxury we can increasingly ill afford—no parent should relax his vigilance in guarding against sowing the seeds of intolerance.\textsuperscript{28}

Nadine Ricks and Marilyn Marsh give this example of an emphatic conclusion by quoting from Stephen Leacock's essay, "Americans Are Queer."

> But that's all right, The Americans don't give a damn; don't need to--never did need to. That is their salvation.\textsuperscript{29}

**Summary**

In teaching students to have interesting content, the teacher must begin by preparing assignments which will encourage students to say something worthwhile. Next he should be sure that his students are ready to write. The teacher may also want to give the students suggestions concerning different ways to handle general topics; students may need special help even when writing about personal

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{27}Lee J. Martin, The Five-Hundred-Word Theme (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968), pp. 5-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{28}Hogins and Yarber, p. 183.
  \item \textsuperscript{29}Nadine Ricks and Marilyn Marsh, Patterns in English (New York, 1969), p. 185.
\end{itemize}
experiences. Students may arouse the interest of readers through strong beginnings, either by plunging directly into topics or by using formal introductions for indirect appeal. One of the easiest and most effective ways to conclude a five-hundred word theme is to restate the central idea of the composition.
CHAPTER III

SOUND REASONING

The teacher of composition probably cannot hope to give a full treatment of logic in the classroom. Albert R. Kitzhaber gives this opinion of the uses of logic in the classroom:

... a few of the principles of logic ought to be made known to the student if he is to become a better writer of expository prose. Though few teachers are—or should be expected to be—trained logicians, they and all other teachers teach some of the elements of logic informally whenever they insist on clear thinking in recitation or writing. It should be helpful to student and teacher alike, in a course dealing with expository writing, to identify a few of these principles of clear thinking so they become a conscious part of the student's equipment for analyzing the writing and speaking of others and for guiding his own practice. Considering the restrictions imposed by time and by the formal training of the teachers, the amount of this material to be included would have to be severely limited.¹

Not attempting to give a course in formal logic, the composition teacher should deal with some of the basic principles of sound reasoning, defining logic and giving its historical highlights. The teacher can help the student

discover (1) the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning, (2) the common errors in logic related to fallacious thinking, and (3) the errors in logic related to illogical sentence structure.

Logic is a process of reasoning. Stuart Chase defines logic as "the process of drawing a conclusion from one or more propositions, called premises." Logicians say there are two ways to reason, wrongly and soundly. Robert H. Thouless explains that crooked thinking occurs when the sound processes of thought become clouded by prejudices or emotions. The tendency for the emotions to twist what one says or hears is strong indeed, as is indicated by Bertrand Russell's well-known declension of firm: "I am firm; you are obstinate; he is pig-headed." Very much a part of human nature, the emotions can block clear thinking; the best defense against the prejudices which may affect one's conclusions is a knowledge of some principles of sound reasoning.

The study of these principles was first begun by the ancient Greeks. Their efforts culminated in the syllogism, a tool invented by Aristotle to test the relationships of premises and conclusions. The syllogism, with its intricate workings, was the basis of the study of formal logic for over

---

2Stuart Chase, Guides to Straight Thinking (New York, 1956), p. 5.

two thousand years. In the early twentieth century, a new logic developed: mathematical or symbolic logic, which accounts for many of the difficulties encountered in dealing with the syllogism. Symbolic logic is also a highly intricate system of reasoning, a discipline which the teacher should not try to deal with in depth.

To understand the basic nature of sound reasoning, the teacher should make the distinction between deductive and inductive thinking. In explaining the differences between these two methods of thinking, Monroe C. Beardsley writes:

In a deductive argument, the statements that make up the reason are called premises, and the conclusion is said to be "deduced," whether correctly or incorrectly, from the premises. In an inductive argument, the statements that make up the reason are called the evidence, and the conclusion is said to be "induced from," or "supported by" the evidence.

Thus there are two basically different kinds of reasoning that we do. In one kind, we try to dig out of a premise, or set of premises, what seems to be necessarily implied by them. In the other kind, we try to discover what is probably true in the light of whatever evidence we have on hand.²

More simply, deduction is the process of using a generalization (the premise) to lead to a specific observation (the conclusion). In contrast, induction uses specific facts and illustrations (the evidence) to lead to a general

⁴For a condensed discussion of the differences between Aristotelian and symbolic logic, see Harold C. Martin and Richard M. Ohmann, The Logic and Rhetoric of Composition (New York, 1964), pp. 72-89.

observation (the conclusion). Another difference is that deduction is concerned with the validity with which the conclusion is drawn from the premises; induction is concerned with the truth of the evidence as it affects the generalization.6

The difference between the two can be pointed out clearly if the teacher uses examples such as the ones given by Manuel Bilsky. An example of deduction begins with a general statement, such as "All cats are mortal," which is followed by the specific one "Tabitha, a cat, is mortal."7 The conclusion follows "necessarily" from the premise; to conclude that Tabitha has nine lives would not be valid. Nor is the cat examined or observed to see if it is actually mortal. "The conclusion follows because a certain logical relationship holds among the statements which make up the argument. And if this relationship does actually hold . . . the conclusion has been validly drawn from the premises."8 The validity of the statements is tested by the rules governing the syllogism. In explaining induction, an example of specific statements of fact or experience such as "Socrates is mortal" is followed by the conclusion "All men are mortal."9 The conclusion is true as supported by the evidence.

---

6 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
8 Ibid., p. 64.  
9 Ibid.
"The facts are grounds, reasons for the truth of the statements we are trying to prove. The more instances we can show of mortal men, the more reason there is to accept the truth of the general statement ... for truth we look at the world of experience, at the facts."\(^{10}\)

The teacher may want to use short paragraphs to show the student how these two methods of thinking are developed. The following paragraph is an example of the deductive method which begins with a generalization that obligatory military service should be avoided.

Let's not be carried away by the proponents of universal military training. Think of how much money it will cost. And as for its improving health: those who need it most won't get it. Forty per cent of our young men will be rejected as physically unfit.\(^{11}\)

An example of the inductive method is shown in this paragraph which begins with a specific fact, leading up to a conclusion:

One day I had a bacon and tomato sandwich for lunch. That evening, I noticed a small rash on my right cheek, which disappeared by the next morning. Two days later I had a lettuce and tomato salad with my dinner. Once again the rash appeared. At its third appearance, after I had eaten a cheese and tomato sandwich, I decided it was time to see an allergist.\(^{12}\)

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the differences between deductive and inductive thinking may seem too complex for many freshman students. The teacher

\(^{10}\text{Ibid., pp. 64-65.}\) \(^{11}\text{Ibid., p. 34.}\) \(^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 92.}\)
should not dwell too long on explaining these differences; he should avoid drawing circles to explain the syllogism. This kind of analysis usually belongs in the philosophy class. Rather, the teacher's aim in discussing these differences should be to clarify inductive thinking, and clarification may be easier when induction is distinguished from deduction. In emphasizing the definition of inductive thinking, the teacher is showing the student how facts may lead, in truth, to a conclusion and how facts may also leap to a conclusion. Here the teacher is getting at the root of one error in fallacious thinking—the hasty generalization.

A hasty generalization is probably the most common fallacy to be found in the student's composition. As Stuart Chase points out, a hasty generalization "is the commonest, probably the most seductive, and potentially the most dangerous, of all the fallacies."¹³ Langdon Elsbree and Frederick Bracher identify three types of hasty generalization: the stereotype—"the trite unchanging picture of an ethnic group, a profession, or a social role"; oversimplification—"making a question seem easier than it is"; and the unqualified generalization—"the exaggerated claim made from insufficient evidence."¹⁴

¹³Chase, p. 39.
¹⁴Langdon Elsbree and Frederick Bracher, Heath's College Handbook of Composition (Boston, 1967), p. 68.
The teacher needs to make the student aware of the stereotype ("Henry was the typical freshman, looking lost and scared"), for the student who writes such a sentence may use it unconsciously, seeing a particular person or fact as typical of a class or group, not allowing for individual differences. Oversimplification is often found in the use of statistics. Lionel Ruby explains in his essay "Are All Generalizations False?" that statistical information, such as Kinsey's report, is affected by the sample. Kinsey's sample is somewhat unrepresentative and biased: the inferences drawn are more complex than some people wish to consider.

The third kind of generalization involves a problem in qualification. On the basis of a few examples, the student writer jumps to the conclusion that what he has observed holds true for all of a particular class or group. For example, if the young writer has been associating with campus militants, he may conclude that students throughout the country are in a state of unrest. The teacher must demand that the writer qualify his statement; on the basis of the writer's observations, some students may be militant, but certainly not all.

Non-sequitur, meaning "it does not follow," is another fallacy common to students' writing. This fallacy may take

15 Ibid.
17 Elsbree and Bracher, pp. 68-69.
the form "He has no common sense; therefore he will never be successful." The conclusion, often signaled by a transitional expression such as therefore, does not logically follow from the premise. As Robert Gorham Davis points out, non-sequiturs usually reveal the personal feelings of the student, having "conclusions which are psychologically interesting in themselves, but have nothing to do with the given premises."18 W. Ward Fearnside and William B. Holther point out that many statements taking this form, signaled by a connective, may be fallacious according to logical rules, but a close relationship does exist between the statements. Fearnside and Holther use this example: "Every reasonable man will want to regulate his life according to moral principles. Yet we all are tempted to make exceptions in our own cases. Therefore, we ought to make allowances for the lapses of others."19 They state that "the three propositions probably are true in a fairly evident sense, and they are closely related to the same subject. The 'therefore' makes them sound like a syllogism instead of a complex observation on life. But what follows 'therefore' is no consequence in logic of what precedes."20 The student

18 Hogins and Yarber, p. 66.  
20 Ibid.
can correct this error by changing the form of his statements, showing that his observation of life is only that, and not a formal conclusion. A better arrangement may be "We ought to make allowances for the lapses of others. Although every reasonable man will want to regulate his life according to moral principles, he is often tempted to make exceptions in his own case."

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc, meaning "after this, therefore because of this," is another fallacy used by the student which may take the form "Ronald failed freshman English because he used sentence fragments in his compositions." The fallacy is assuming that an effect, failing freshman English, was the result of a single cause, writing sentence fragments. However, Ronald's failing may be due to multiple causes: his essays were incoherent; he did not do the required assignments; or he did not attend class. This example illustrates a quibbling point. No matter how conscientious a student may be in attending class and doing the assignments, he will probably fail, unfortunately, if he writes sentence fragments. The student has gone to the heart of the matter in saying that writing sentence fragments is the immediate cause of Ronald's failing. The danger in cause-effect relationships lies in the student's assuming a single cause as he deals with social, economic, or political problems. The student who writes that inflation is due to increasing interest rates has illustrated an ignorance of
multiple causes. Fearnside and Holther call this fallacy vulgar "since it is not only common but also ignorant."\textsuperscript{21}

Still another fallacy often found in the student's composition involves appeals to emotion, using a basic human tendency to distort the facts of an argument. The student does not use sound reasoning but appeals to the emotions of his reader in order to give weight to his argument. Fearnside and Holther list and explain\textsuperscript{22} the following as appeals to emotion:

1. **Appeal to Authority**: "Ipse dixit" or "He says so!"
2. **Impressing by Large Numbers**: "get on the band wagon"
3. **Popular Passions**: "ad populum appeals"
4. **Damning the Origin**: "consider the source"
5. **Personal Attacks**: "ad hominem"
6. **Forestalling Disagreement**
7. **Creating Misgivings**: "where there's smoke there's fire"

Teachers may make these appeals to emotion clear to their students by presenting specific examples such as the following:

1. According to the latest medical journal, Pearly-White is the most effective in preventing tooth decay.
2. Fifty million Frenchmen can not be wrong.
3. Anyone who supports Medicare is a communist.
4. Congress's allotting four billion dollars to the space

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 84-104.
program is just another example of its ignoring minority groups.

5. No one should pay attention to what Dr. Spock has to say about raising children since he was arrested for advocating draft resistance.

6. Everybody knows that government control of business leads to communism.

7. Barbara Garson's book Macbird has received so much publicity that there must be some truth to her story.

These seven appeals to emotion are essentially dishonest. If the student uses these appeals, he is trying to win his argument through misconceptions and prejudices. But the student may use some appeals to emotion which are legitimate. For example, if he attempts to prove that penal institutions need to be reformed, he may give some instances of brutality inflicted by prison guards. A specific incident of brutality, graphically described, would be an essentially emotional appeal to the reader but would also serve to give the reader a "knowledge-of-acquaintance" with the subject rather than an uninvolved "knowledge-about" the subject. 23

Not wishing the student's composition to read like a stock-market report, the teacher should encourage the legitimate use of appeals to emotion.

23 Ibid., p. 84.
In addition to helping the student correct fallacies which are clearly errors of confused or prejudiced thinking, the teacher may often mark a student's statement for faulty logic when, in reality, the sentence structure of his statement is illogical. Whenever the student uses illogical sentence structure to express himself, the logical relationships of his ideas are usually clear to him and may even be clear to his reader too. But possibly as the result of thinking faster than writing, the student gives a logical thought in an illogical form. For example, the student may write: "Since John came to college developed pneumonia." But he means "John developed pneumonia after he came to college." The faulty sentence structure is often labeled illogical by the teacher. A similar problem in logic is in this example given by Glenn Leggett, C. David Mead, and William Charvat: "I have always thought that the present time was a rather unhappy time because there are always worries, but as the time went on I looked back at these times as the only happy times."24 Leggett, Mean, and Charvat explain:

The writer . . . probably meant to say that experience grows more pleasant in retrospect. But his sentence structure does not permit him to move from the present to the future and then to the past, as he wants to. We

would have to say of the sentence, as did the confused young boy trying to give directions to some travelers, *You can't get there from here*. 

Many handbooks point out common errors in sentence structure. The following sentences illustrate some of these errors:

1. Sentences in which the construction does not show the relationship of ideas:
   a. Russell thinks illogically, and he is quickly angered. (Corrected by subordinating the second clause: "Russell thinks illogically when he is quickly angered.")
   
   b. The freshman was asked to read the chapter on logic, but he always made hasty generalizations in his writing. (Corrected by subordination: "The freshman was asked to read the chapter on logic because he always made hasty generalizations in his writing."
   
   Or corrected by separating the clause with a period: "The freshman was asked to read the chapter on logic. He always made hasty generalizations in his writing.")

2. Sentences in which the construction is illogically mixed:
   a. Because he failed his first theme made the student unhappy. (Corrected by placing the subordinate clause, which is in the subject position, in a subordinate position and supplying a subject:

---

25 Ibid.
"Because he failed his first theme, the student was unhappy." Or corrected by replacing the subordinate clause with a gerund phrase: "Failing his first theme made the student unhappy.")

b. The student should learn that in college how hard he must study. (Corrected by replacing the subordinate clause following that with a subject and predicate for the that clause: "The student should learn that in college he must study hard.")

It is helpful for the teacher to mark the above errors as faulty sentence structure rather than errors in logic, for if the teacher writes poor logic on the student's paper, the latter often takes it as a personal affront.

Some authorities point out that a sentence structure may be illogical due to faulty subordination. Hans P. Guth gives an example in which an idea seems to be illogically subordinated:

He had a completely accident-free record up to the last day of his employment, when he stepped on a power line and almost lost his life. 26

But Hodges and Whitten point out that such a sentence is not essentially illogical. Rather subordination is used "to relate ideas concisely and effectively." 27

---


examples, the ideas appear first in separate sentences, according to a time sequence. Then the ideas are shown to be subordinated effectively and concisely.

Frank was listening to the radio. He heard the news then. His mother was killed in an automobile accident. The accident had occurred at ten o'clock.

Listening to the radio, Frank heard that his mother had been killed in an automobile accident at ten o'clock.

When the subordination of ideas is a result of timing (conciseness) and stylistic choice (effectiveness), the teacher should not mark such sentences for illogical sentence structure.

Summary

In teaching logic, the teacher should not attempt to deal with all the complexities of formal logic; he should not demand air-tight conclusions, for neither he nor his students are always logical. Rather, the teacher should ask for reasonableness in the student's composition, teaching him to avoid using hasty generalizations, non-sequiturs, faulty cause-effect relationships, and appeals to emotion. The teacher should also demand clarity in the student's sentences, teaching him to correct apparently unrelated ideas (juxtaposed in one sentence) and mixed constructions.

28 Ibid.
ORGANIZING ACCORDING TO PURPOSE

The teacher needs to show most students how to organize a composition, since he often finds that his students have no clear direction in their writing. When assigned a topic such as "My First Month Away From Home," they will write about everything from spending too much money to registering for classes. The teacher should help students give direction to their writing through organization, showing them how to plan compositions by organizing with a purpose.

The first step in having a direction is to find the purpose for writing a composition. James M. McCrimmon writes that purpose is "the over-all design which controls what the writer is to do in the essay." In controlling his essay, the student should restrict his subject, decide what point of view to take, and determine how to present that point of view effectively. As McCrimmon further points out, these stages in finding a purpose may overlap; one stage may occur as the result of another.

---

One way to find a purpose is for the student to learn to recognize a broad subject area and to limit what he will say about it. Lee J. Martin advises the student: "Limiting yourself to a single subject is called giving your paper direction, or unity. You cannot support a broad point in a paper of five hundred words. Single direction is easier when the subject is limited." In many classrooms the student is usually given a list of broad topics such as "Cars," "Education," and "Sports." If he chooses the topic "Sports," he may first divide "Sports" into "High School Sports," "College Sports," and "Professional Sports." The student may further limit the subject to football in high school and produce such topics as "The Value of High School Football to the Player" or "An Adequate Football Stadium for My High School."  

As Francis Connolly points out, a general subject should be restricted because it "must be specifically adapted to the needs of an occasion and to the writer's purpose." The occasion for writing is influenced by the specific reader. A paper on "The Value of High School Football to the Player" is appropriate for a high school audience, but such a hackneyed

---

4 Ibid., pp. 21-23.
The student should address readers according to their interest and knowledge of the subject, for if the student writes to his English teacher, he probably cannot effectively restrict his subject nor even have an interest in it himself. The occasion for writing is further affected by the length of an assigned composition. The student may be able to write a term paper on "The Value of High School Football," but he probably cannot cover this subject in depth in a five-hundred word composition.

Connolly uses purpose to mean the point of view the student takes toward his subject and reader. The student may wish to inform his reader about his point of view, or persuade the reader to his point of view, or narrate, or describe his point of view. Hodges and Whitten give this advice to students:

Before making a final decision regarding the specific topic, you should consider your purpose in writing the composition. If your purpose is to inform the reader, either "The Importance of Fumbles in Saturday's Game" or "Characteristics of a Good Shortstop" would be appropriate. If, however, your primary aim is to describe your feelings as you watched a particularly heartbreaking defeat, you might want to title your theme "A Cold Day at Memorial Stadium." On the other hand, you might decide that you want to argue about the merits of watching football as compared with watching baseball. You might then write a theme on the topic "Football or Baseball as a Spectator Sport" or "I Would Rather Watch Football than

---

6 Ibid., pp. 6-7.  
7 Ibid., p. 7.
Baseball." Finally, you might decide to write a narrative account of the most exciting five minutes of a football game. Then your topic might be "With Only Minutes to Go."  

Of course, the point of view the student takes relates to the four forms of discourse: exposition, description, argument, and narration. Seldom, however, does a composition consist solely of only one form of discourse, although one form may dominate. An essay on "The Need for Slum Clearance in My City," for example, may be predominantly argument; but it may have some exposition to explain why the slums are there and some description to convince the reader of a need for change. In fact, the student may decide that merely a description of the slums would be the most effective way to convince his reader. In this way, the student decides not only what his point of view is but also how he may best present that point of view.

After the student has determined his purpose, it is helpful for him to state this purpose in a thesis statement, a one-sentence capsule of the main idea of the paper. The thesis statement may further restrict the subject, for as Robert M. Gorrell and Charlton Laird point out, the thesis statement should not merely be an expanded version of the

---


9 Ibid., p. 367.
title. If the student is given the topic "What the School Catalog Did Not Tell," he may feel the topic is fairly restricted; and he may decide to address his paper to entering college freshmen, informing them through exposition of his point of view. The student may be tempted to write as his thesis statement: "The school catalog did not tell me anything about life on campus." But this sentence is only an expansion of his title. The teacher may wish to attack this problem by teaching the student to restrict his subject properly, as shown in the first part of this chapter, or he may wish to show the student how framing a thesis statement may do this for him—for instance, by listing specific facets of "life on campus."

As many handbooks suggest, the student may begin to devise a thesis statement by listing his ideas about the topic, even those which may seem irrelevant. For example, the student may jot down the following ideas about what the school catalog did not tell him:

1. Dormitory food awful
2. Freshmen always get Saturday classes
3. One bathroom for thirty people in the dormitory
4. Never a seat in the coffee shop
5. Roommate a messy housekeeper

---

After examining the list of ideas, the teacher can show the student that the first, third, and fifth items on his list all relate to living in the dormitory.

After the student has channeled his thinking to restrict his topic to dormitory living, he is ready to write his thesis statement, preferably in a simple sentence. One of the best guides for writing a thesis statement is presented by Martin, who gives this advice to the student:

If your paper is to have a single direction, it must develop a single subject. If your thesis statement contains more than one subject, it is not a good one because you are obligated to develop each subject. . . . What you say about the subject in the predicate area is the most important part of the thesis statement, for it is here that you give expression to your own point of view that is going to be explored and supported in the rest of the paper. 11 The predicate area must also be limited.

The student's thesis statement may read "The school catalog did not tell about the frustrations of dormitory living." This thesis statement expresses both the dominant idea of the paper and the purpose, which is to inform.

When the student has finally written his thesis statement, however, he may have forgotten that his purpose is to inform his reader. Although his thesis statement may imply that purpose, it is helpful, as some handbooks suggest, for the student to write a purpose statement, separate from the thesis statement. 12 The purpose statement might read, "This

12 See Hodges and Whitten, p. 368.
composition will inform the reader by using examples of what
the catalog did not tell me about life in the dormitory."
The purpose statement is a good device for reminding the
student of his point of view. If encouraged to add such a
phrase as "by using examples," he will also have decided
how he will present that point of view.

The thesis statement, along with the purpose statement,
is used for a composition which has a main idea. However,
as McCrimmon points out, not all compositions are controlled
by a main idea, in which case the student will write only
the purpose statement, or what McCrimmon calls a "statement
of intent."¹³ A composition which has a purpose but no main
idea should not ordinarily have a thesis statement. McCrimmon
explains a statement of intent in this way for the student:

... if you want to explain the operation of a
Diesel engine or to summarize the events leading
to the Boston Tea Party, your paper will not have
a dominant idea, although it will have a clear purpose.
Any attempt to pretend it has a thesis by writing
such a statement as "The operation of the Diesel
engine is complex" or "The background of the Boston
Tea Party is interesting" would waste time and distort
your real intention. For you are concerned not with
the complexity of the Diesel engine but with its mode
of operation, and you have no intention of proving
that the events leading up to the Boston Tea Party
were "interesting" but only of showing what they were.¹⁴

The student would not write a thesis statement for such
compositions, but he would give a statement of intent, such

¹³McCrimmon, p. 18.
¹⁴Ibid., p. 25.
as "This essay will explain the operation of the Diesel engine" or "This essay will present the events leading to the Boston Tea Party."

After the student has found this purpose for writing and has stated it in a thesis statement, a purpose statement, or a statement of intent, he knows what direction his paper will take. But he must further plan his paper, keeping his purpose firmly in mind. Some teachers may want the student to map out a purpose according to the traditional methods of outlining: the topic outline, the sentence outline, or the paragraph outline.

One objection to traditional outlines is that most students detest making them. Often the student will write his paper and then make an outline to fit it, a procedure which completely destroys the effectiveness of teaching outlining. Martin suggests that the student be asked to write only one sentence which will both state his purpose and outline his essay. A student choosing the topic "The Value of Football to My School" may have decided football has no value and should be abolished. The student's one-sentence outline may be stated thus:

In this paper, I intend to support the main point that interschool football should be discontinued at Consolidated High because (1) the cost of interschool football is prohibitive, (2) scholarship is forced to take a second place to football,

15 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
and (3) the effect of interschool football on the student body is deleterious.\footnote{Ibid., p. 34.}

This one sentence may be taught as a combination of the purpose statement and the thesis statement. Of course, not all compositions can be organized in this way, particularly compositions developed by way of description or narration. Not all compositions can be outlined in one sentence, nor can all compositions fit neatly into the traditional forms. Traditional outlining may further seem to be a separate entity to the student, something considered apart from his purpose since traditional outlining usually does not deal with the four forms of discourse. Perhaps the best approach to outlining is to consider it as a plan which is based on exposition, argument, description, or narration—a plan which may call for the overlapping of one or the other of these four forms.

Exposition may be organized in several ways. Sheridan Baker gives several helpful suggestions for planning the expository paper which may deal with facts, causes and effects, comparisons and contrasts, and definitions. Baker explains that some expository essays are organized through an obviously natural ordering of facts. This order is used in the "how to" composition in which the student achieves coherence by presenting the steps of a process in a natural order. Other compositions presenting a series of facts which follow a
because, such as the one in the one-sentence outline, may also be planned through a natural ordering of the facts. The only consideration the student may give to the order of presenting reasons is that he may wish to give, for emphasis, what he considers the most important reason last. Another expository essay which follows a natural plan is one that poses a problem and then presents possible solutions.  

Although the natural order of organization may seem obvious to some students, others might overlook this method of organization unless the teacher points it out.

According to Baker, some expository papers dealing with cause and effect may be organized in two ways. A student may first state an effect and then discuss possible causes. Or he may give a cause and discuss the possible effects it may have. In the first instance, the student may give in his introduction an effect, such as a football game that was lost. The body of the essay may discuss the possible conditions that caused the game to be lost, such as "the bad weather," "the previous games unexpectedly lost," and "the other side's unusually strong team." The conclusion of the essay may restate the effect: "The lost game was possibly caused by bad breaks." In the second plan for organizing causes and effects, the reverse happens. The student presents

---

18 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
a cause, such as a new sports rule, and the adverse effects that the rule may have on the losing team. For the greatest effectiveness, the student should be careful that the effects he foresees in the future are as nearly feasible as he can make them. 19

As Baker points out, other expository papers may be organized by comparison or contrast. Comparison develops an idea by showing how it resembles something else. In this way, comparison may become an extended analogy, but it usually does not encompass an entire composition; more likely, an extended analogy is one paragraph within the body of the paper. 20 A paper advanced by contrast uses two similar entities, showing how they are different, usually convincing the reader that one is better than the other. The problem with "comparative contrasts" is that the student may write so much about one entity that his reader may forget about the other. For example, if the student wishes to compare and contrast East Germany and West Germany, he may follow this rule given by Baker:

... run your contrasts point by point and this you may do in one of two ways: (1) by making a topic sentence to cover one point--agriculture, let us say--and then continuing your paragraph in paired sentences, one for the West, one for the East ... or (2) by writing your paragraphs in pairs, one paragraph for the West, one for the

19 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
20 Ibid., pp. 83-84.
East, using the topic sentence of the first paragraph to govern the second . . . .

Baker adds that other expository papers are organized by defining the subject. The definition may be presented by synthesis in which the subject, seen as a part of a whole, is shown in relation to an entire class. Or it may be given through example: the student starts with a subject representing a whole class and breaks down that subject into members of the class through examples or illustrations. Or the student may define through comparison, or by analysis, a "searching out and explaining of the essentials in terms used generally, loosely, and often in ways that emphasize incidentals for biased reasons, as when it is said that an intellectual is an unrealistic dreamer." To develop a full definition, the student must not only include what his subject is, but also what it is not. The four steps that Baker considers in giving a complete definition are the following:

1. what it is not like.
2. what it is like.
3. what it is not.
4. what it is.

These four steps may be used as the organizational pattern for an essay developed by definition.

---

21 Ibid., p. 84.  
22 Ibid., p. 87.  
23 Ibid., p. 88.  
24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid., p. 89.
Argument also has a distinct set of organizational patterns. Hans P. Guth presents these five ways to plan an essay controlled by persuasion:

(1) The logical coherence of the paper may derive from cause-and-effect relationships.

I. First step: the author states his central concern, bringing out its interesting, startling, or paradoxical aspects:
Children like poetry; . . . Most college freshmen, on the other hand, are either indifferent or hostile toward poetry, both traditional and modern.

II. Second step: the author asks and answers the obvious question: Why? Poetry is often presented to students as something special and solemn; . . . many students regard it as drudgery; . . .

III. Third step: The author suggests remedies at least partly implied in the diagnosis:
Teachers of poetry should emphasize oral reading; . . . cater to their students' interest in song and story by including ballads and narrative poetry; . . .

(2) Another logical pattern particularly effective in setting a paper in motion leads to a desired conclusion through qualification of or attack upon a familiar idea:

I. First step: A familiar idea is confirmed:
It is true that many required courses do not help to prepare the student for his professional career (detailed illustrations).

II. Second step: A qualification or objection is stated:
But a responsible citizen must be able to recognize competence and quackery in fields other than his own (detailed illustrations).

III. Third step: A balanced conclusion is drawn:
Therefore, a student needs required courses that give him a basic understanding of some important disciplines outside his own field.
A third logical pattern is modeled on the inductive argument which presents examples, case histories, or evidence and then draws a general conclusion:

I. First step: Data are presented:
   Carlotta Brink, heroine of Vengeance Is Mine,
   A. is rude to her servants (examples)
   B. insults tradesmen (examples)
   C. attempts to put other people in the wrong (examples)
   D. is unconcerned about her husband's business problems (examples)
   E. scolds her children without provocation (examples)

II. Second step: The conclusion is drawn:
    Carlotta is inconsiderate and unkind.

If a subject is complicated without being controversial, initial statement and subsequent support of the central idea is often the preferable procedure...

I. First step: The general conclusion is stated:
   A part-time job can supplement a student's academic training.

II. Second step: The reasons for the conclusion are enumerated:
   A. Part-time work can provide a valuable practical education...
   B. It can provide field work related to the student's major field of study...
   C. It can provide valuable psychological training...

In many papers an inductive paragraph becomes one link in a logical chain. Sustained logical reasoning makes unusual demands both on writer and reader. Here is a rough outline of a deductive argument, which draws conclusions from premises previously established or applies generalizations to specific instances:

I. A college should develop in its students a sense for spiritual values (elaboration and support).
II. Architecture gives tangible expression to such values as dignity and permanence (elaboration and support).

III. The buildings facing the traditional Inner Quad of the college exhibit several of these qualities (elaboration and support).

IV. Of the modern classroom buildings on this campus, few suggest a sense of tradition, a sense of style, a feeling of dignity (elaboration and support).

V. Therefore, the buildings surrounding the Inner Quad should not be torn down to make room for additional "cell block" structures.28

Unlike argumentative essays, descriptive essays are controlled by a dominant impression. Connolly points out:

Writers who employ artistic description attempt to make the reader as intensely aware of an object, real or imagined, as they can. . . . Nor does artistic description aim merely to supply vivid details. Details, however vivid, do not of themselves result in a dominant, meaningful impression. . . . Details must be selected and organized to create a single dominant impression.27

Connolly goes on to show how Edith Wharton, in describing Ethan Frome, creates this kind of impression when she writes that Frome, in reality a "ruin of a man," is yet "the most striking figure in Starkfield."28 Description, controlled by a dominant impression, is ordered by space and time.

Baker says that "description is essentially spatial. . . . The best spatial description follows the perception of a

26 Hans P. Guth, Words and Ideas (Belmont, California, 1966), pp. 229-231.

27 Connolly, pp. 574-575.

28 Ibid., p. 575.
person entering or looking at the space described. . . ."

Spatial description may be viewed as width (as one walks from one block on the street to another) or as depth (standing at one end of a long corridor and looking toward the other end) or as height (slowly looking up to the top of a tall building). Baker further adds that "description frequently blends space and time, with the observer's perceptions unifying the two as he moves through them, and takes his readers with him." The writer describes the most significant details first, then moves to describe the smaller details. He most often describes people by blending space and time. Seldom is description used throughout an essay; it is usually only a part, many times a part of narration.

The organization of narration is familiar to most students. Through his reading of fiction, the student probably knows that narration has a time order, pyramid-shaped, in which the action ascends to a climax and then descends to a conclusion. But he may not know how to adapt this time sequence to a five-hundred word composition. The following outline, suggested by Betty Lester and Mary Jo Martin, gives a three-step organization for narration:

---

29 Baker, pp. 76-77.
30 Ibid., p. 77.
31 Ibid.
1. The opening--time, place, characters

2. The incident
   a) The moments just before the main event, or incident (only those events which help to produce the desired effect of the climax)
   b) Description of the incident, leading to a climax

3. The ending--the reaction of the storyteller to the incident

To be sure, this outline is only a simplified version of narration as used by professional writers, but it may help the student learn to adapt narration to his own essays.

Summary

The teacher should emphasize that the key to organization is purpose. The purpose for writing may be discovered as the student limits a subject or decides what effect he wants his composition to have on his reader. Sometimes purpose is written as a separate statement, or it may be a part of the thesis statement or the one-sentence outline. But once the student has decided upon his purpose, he knows what direction his paper should take; he organizes by using a one-sentence outline or one of the plans for exposition, argument, description, or narration.

CHAPTER V

DEMON ERRORS

The status of teaching grammar in freshman English is in flux. Herman A. Estrin asked teachers from eighty colleges what they thought about teaching grammar in their English courses. The answers ranged from teaching no grammar at all to either giving a thorough course in traditional grammar or teaching the history of the language as the subject matter of the course. Between the two extremes are the courses which integrate grammar and composition, teaching grammar in connection with improving composition. Although freshman English courses vary considerably, Albert R. Kitzhaber points out that, in the main, English departments are moving away from giving formal instruction in grammar in the classroom. The teacher may discuss a certain error in class if the students' compositions warrant it, but usually he directs the student to a handbook.

Those attending the Anglo-American Conference held in 1966, at Dartmouth College, discussed the teaching of grammar

---

1 Herman A. Estrin, "What Professors Think About Grammar," The CEA Critic, XXIII (March, 1961), 6-7, 11-12.

in the English class. During this conference John Dixon pointed out some of the problems of teaching grammar. He has written:

> When we taught traditional grammar we could not, as research showed, claim to affect language in operation. In fact grammar teachers, both past and present, have been among those most guilty of imposing a body of knowledge which never became a guide to action or a point of reference. It may be, however, that newer grammars will affect language in operation; that remains to be demonstrated.

> On the other hand, language is an area where many misconceptions have grown up in school, just at the time when modern linguistics has been developing a frame of reference that enables us to comprehend them.

> But it would be folly for teachers of English to impose linguistic bodies of knowledge on pupils. If a pupil has sensed that there is a problem or an issue, and is perhaps struggling to find terms in which it can be discussed, he will see the point of having a frame of reference. He must learn to solve his own problems, guided by the teacher whose awareness and broader frame of reference gives him a better perspective—and a better chance of seeing the pupil's difficulties and encouraging them to emerge.3

Those scholars attending the conference raised yet another question: can linguists provide a grammar that will improve writing?

> Such linguists as C. C. Fries, Albert H. Marckwardt, and Sumner Ives claim that grammar based on a linguistic approach can be effective in teaching composition. 4 Yet Paul Roberts writes:

---


I think that the effect of linguistics on the teaching of English may be profound but that it will not be the sort of effect commonly expected. There seems to be a widespread hope that the teaching of grammar according to linguistic principles will lead directly to a great improvement in writing, a falling off in comma faults, fragments, dangling modifiers, and such errors. I think that linguistics might make some contribution in this direction, but I doubt that it will be substantial. Certainly I know of no way in which punctuation can be taught or in which "sentence sense" can be communicated to those who haven't got it, except through some kind of teaching of the grammar; and it is reasonable to suppose that a good grammar will serve better here than a confusing one.  

Although there is some hope that linguists will provide a panacea for the composition teacher, at present the teaching of grammar as such in the classroom is declining. It is as Porter G. Perrin says:

Looking at the situation squarely shows that the argument now flourishing over "traditional grammar" vs. "linguistics" is a secondary issue. The basic question is, How much direct attention to the language should be given in a course in writing? The answer is, As much as is necessary to encourage habits of effective expression.  

Teaching language to achieve effective expression involves not only formal grammar but also aspects of style. Approaches to teaching maturity of style will be presented in Chapter VI of this thesis. This chapter will deal with those facets of grammar necessary for effective compositions, necessary

---


for eliminating or revising structures that hamper effective communication. Since opinion is divided on the seriousness of some grammatical errors, only those errors which appear in failing compositions are considered here—the demon errors: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, subject-verb disagreement, and spelling errors.

When teaching the student to avoid using sentence fragments, perhaps it is only fair for the teacher to admit that professional writers do use sentence fragments. However, as J. N. Hook and E. G. Mathews have found, only 1 per cent of the sentences used by professional writers are sentence fragments—used effectively. To satisfy the student who wants to write effective fragments, the teacher can let him mark with an asterisk a sentence fragment that he uses deliberately in his composition. The danger in giving the student this freedom is obvious: the student who does not understand what a sentence is will mark every sentence he has doubts about. The teacher should make it clear that writers usually avoid punctuating as a sentence a phrase that logically is a part of the sentence preceding it. These types of sentence fragments, then, are the ones the student should avoid.


8 Ibid., p. 108.
Paul Roberts lists and gives examples of the structures commonly punctuated as sentences by the student. These structures are (1) noun clusters, (2) verb clusters, (3) prepositional phrases, (4) relative clauses, and (5) subordinate clauses. The sentence fragment most often follows the sentence that it should be connected with and is corrected by changing capitalization and joining the fragment with that sentence, usually with a comma. The following are examples of fragments and ways to revise them:

1. The student should avoid using sentence fragments. An error which may fail his paper.
   
   Revision: The student should avoid using sentence fragments, an error which may fail his paper.

2. The student should make his language work for him. Being careful to avoid serious grammatical errors.
   
   Revision: The student should make his language work for him, being careful to avoid serious grammatical errors.

3. The student is always complaining. About registration, dormitory food, and freshman English.
   
   Revision: The student is always complaining about registration, dormitory food, and freshman English.

---


10 Ibid., p. 102.
4. The student insisted he had one of the most competent teachers. Who was only a graduate student.
Revision: The student insisted he had one of the most competent teachers, who was only a graduate student.

5. The student can correct careless spelling errors. If he proofreads carefully.
Revision: The student can correct careless spelling errors if he proofreads carefully.

Another demon error is the run-on sentence, which is in reality two sentences incorrectly fused. A run-on sentence may be two independent clauses fused without any punctuation: "The teacher did not like to discuss grammar she taught literature." Or the run-on sentence may appear with a comma between the clauses: "The teacher did not like to discuss grammar, she taught literature." Or the run-on sentence may be joined with a conjunctive adverb preceded by a comma: "The teacher did not like to discuss grammar, therefore she taught literature." The first two instances of the run-on can be corrected by using a period or a semicolon or by using a coordinating conjunction and a comma. The third kind of run-on can be corrected by inserting a comma or a semi-colon. Or, as Roberts suggests, any of the three types of run-on sentences can be rewritten, subordinating one or the other of the main clauses.  

11 Ibid.
As Roberts explains, the student often writes run-on sentences because he has confused the functions of conjunctions, subordinators, and sentence connectors.\textsuperscript{12} All three conjunctions can be placed between two sentences:

Conjunction: The girls wept, and the boys went away.

Subordinator: The girls wept when the boys went away.

Sentence Connector: The girls wept; however, the boys went away.\textsuperscript{13}

All three conjunctions are different because they can share other positions or functions. The coordinating conjunction occurs only between two main clauses, but its position may be marked by a comma or a period. The subordinating conjunction always heads the subordinate clause, but the whole clause may come before or after the main clause. The adverbial conjunction can switch its position in the second main clause. The students can be taught to test a sentence. The and in the sentence "The girls wept, and the boys went away" cannot change its position, but the comma could be changed to a period. The when in the second sentence cannot sensibly be moved to another position, but the entire subordinate clause may precede "The girls wept." The however in the third sentence is an adverbial conjunction since its position can

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 115-116.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 116.
be shifted in the second part of the sentence: "The girls wept; the boys, however, went away." 14

As a student learns to cope with adverbial conjunctions, he may want to know if a comma comes after the adverbial conjunction when it comes between two main clauses—for instance, "The freshman wanted to go see the play; nevertheless he stayed home and wrote a composition." Roberts writes that there is no fixed rule. The student can use his own judgement, but he would be wise to notice the practice of professional writers. A comma is most often used, however, when the adverbial conjunction comes at the end of the second or last main clause: "The freshman wanted to go see the play; he stayed home and wrote a composition, nevertheless." If the adverbial conjunction is placed within the second main clause, commas are used when a break occurs in the sentence: "... play; he, nevertheless, stayed home and wrote a composition." The student can test the sentence for a break by reading it aloud. 15

Reading sentences aloud can help the student correct both sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Sumner Ives writes, "A student can often clarify his constructions and rectify his punctuation simply by reading his themes aloud, for he will generally find that an unEnglish construction cannot be read with the English supra-segmental patterns--what are

14 Ibid., pp. 116-117.
15 Ibid., pp. 110-111.
popularly called intonation patterns—and he has used these since childhood." Supra-segmental patterns the linguists classify as stress, pitch, and juncture.

Juncture is that part of intonation which relates most directly to punctuation. There are four juncture phonemes: Plus juncture distinguishes between "I scream" and "ice cream." Single-bar juncture indicates a slight pause within a sentence. Double-bar juncture indicates a definite pause, marked with a comma, which occurs within a sentence. Double-cross juncture indicates a pause and a stop which divides two sentences. 17 The teacher can ask the student to read his sentences aloud. When the student drops his voice, he indicates the end of one main clause and the beginning of the next. This method may be effective in correcting run-on sentences, for the student will almost always pause and stop between two main clauses. The student may read his sentence fragments as he has punctuated them, however, with a definite break. As Julius S. Rosenson suggests, the student must have practice in hearing and reading sentences aloud. The teacher may have the student count the number of sentences given in a speech. Or the student may read aloud correctly punctuated

16 Sumner Ives, "Linguistics in the Classroom," College English, XVII (December, 1965), 168.

sentences, being careful to drop his voice only before the end punctuation.  

Sentence fragments and run-on sentences are errors more serious than lack of grammatical agreement between the subject and the verb, but the latter error should also concern English teachers. Perrin writes:

We . . . automatically observe the familiar convention that the verb agrees in number with the subject. . . . The few trouble spots that do occur come from slight complications in particular locutions or from the conflicting demands of agreement by form and agreement by meaning. In some instances usage varies: Formal is likely to insist on agreement by form and General to favor agreement by meaning.19

Perrin's last phrase is particularly important. The teacher rather easily can help the student correct some agreement errors because the agreement between the subject and verb is predictable: both is always plural; much is always singular. The teacher can refer to any standard handbook for information about agreement when usage does not vary. He is on sure ground when he discusses predictable subject-verb agreement.

The real problem for the teacher comes in recognizing when usage varies in subject-verb agreement. The following paragraphs present the variances in usage given by Margaret M. Bryant, J. N. Hook, and E. G. Mathews:

---

The none of construction may be considered either singular or plural. "In modern usage, none is more often employed in the plural, according to the studies made. More than 69% of the examples were found to be in the plural."²⁰ Examples: None of the boys is coming to the party.

None of John's children play in the street.

The indefinite pronouns anybody, anyone, each, either, everybody, everyone, neither, nobody, somebody, and someone are "used with both singular and plural verbs, "but singular verbs occur more often."²¹ Examples: Everyone in the class was writing.

Each of us go through life seeking happiness.

When neither/nor or either/or is used, "formal written English" dictates using a singular verb "if the substantives joined are singular, and plural if they are plural. . . . In informal and in spoken English, a plural verb is sometimes used when the substantives joined are singular."²² Examples: Either Harold or Jim is in the wrong.

Neither Kathy nor Jill were anxious.

If there or here begins a sentence, "standard English sources favor there is by an overwhelming proportion when there is a compound subject, the first member of which is singular."²³

²¹ Ibid., p. 9.
²² Ibid., p. 10.
²³ Ibid., p. 13.
Examples: There was food and drinks for everyone who came.

There were a pile of books and a typewriter on his desk.

If a what clause is the subject of a sentence, usage varies when that clause is followed by the verb be. "The number of the verb," when it is followed by "a plural predicate noun, presents a clear case of divided usage: the plural occurs three times as often as the singular."24 Examples: What they want is their individual rights.

What the students fear are grades.

When number is the subject of a sentence, usage varies. "Current practice is to use a plural verb when the subject is a number followed by an of phrase. . . . The singular verb follows the number of."25 Examples: The number of riots is large.

A number of riots have been on college campuses.

When either or neither is the subject of a sentence, traditionalists prefer a singular verb. "But in much colloquial language, and increasingly in written language," a plural verb is used.26 Examples: Either of the answers is correct.

Neither of the girls are shy.

When the second part of a compound sentence is joined to the first with expressions like together with, along

---

24 Ibid., p. 15.  
26 Ibid., p. 231.
with, as well as, and in addition to, formal English prefers a singular verb. "But the feeling of the sentence is definitely plural." Informal English often uses a plural verb.  

Examples: Walt, as well as Bob, is going to summer camp. James, together with his brothers, were at the game.

When the construction one of the is followed by a plural noun with a relative clause, formal grammar uses a plural verb in the relative clause. "... the singular verb seems to be gaining favor even when logic demands a plural, but the singular may offend the sensitivity of the traditionalists." Examples: He is the only one of the children who has a cold. He is one of those students who work diligently.

The teacher, then, should indicate the trouble spots for the student. The student makes errors in agreement either when he does not properly identify the subject because of a phrase or clause intervening between the subject and verb, or when he is not sure whether the subject is singular or plural. When helping the student to correct agreement errors, the teacher should be aware of the variance in usage.

In addition to teaching sentence sense and agreement, the teacher should emphasize the standard spelling of words. A statement often quoted in English classrooms is "ignorance

\[27\text{Ibid., p. 232.} \quad 28\text{Ibid., p. 233.}\]
of the correct spelling of ordinary words is now, and will
probably continue to be, the one universally accepted sign
of the uneducated man." If the student misspells a
colorful but difficult word, his teacher is pleased that he
has used the word at all. Teachers ordinarily agree, how-
ever, that misspelling the short, commonly used word is a
demon error. Various methods to improve spelling of the
common word advocated by authorities such as Roberts, Perrin,
Hodges, and Warriner are set forth in the following para-
graphs.

The student should keep a list of the words he misspells.
Spelling is an individual concern, for the common word
misspelled by one student will be spelled correctly by
another. Any spelling test the teacher may wish to give
should be based on the students' spelling lists.

The student should use a dictionary to help him spell
words properly. Some students seem to be hypersensitive
about using a dictionary; to them use of the dictionary
requires too much time and effort. Since penalties for
spelling errors are severe in most schools, the student can
choose either to take a failing grade or to look up words.  

---

29 John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten, Harbrace College

30 Albert R. Kitzhaber, Themes, Theories, and Therapy:
The student should proofread carefully. Since some spelling errors are the result of carelessness, the student can correct these by reading his composition slowly, only for spelling. Slowing the movement of the eyes is sometimes helpful. A writer can often find misspelled words by pointing to each word with a pencil or by reading lines backwards. 31

The student should be certain that errors in spelling are not a result of mispronouncing the word. The student will often omit a letter in pronouncing a word (the first d in candidate, the first r in library). He may add a letter (an a after the h in athletic, a u after the d in hindrance). Or he may change a letter (the second u to e in accumulate, the u to i in particular). Or he may transpose letters (the e and r in perhaps, the v and l in cavalry). 32

The student should learn to make word associations. The most commonly used association is the mnemonic device:

There is a rat in separate.

All right is like all wrong.

The principal is a prince of a pal.

There is a liar in familiar. 33

---

32 Hodges and Whitten, pp. 169-170.
33 Paul S. Anderson, Resource Materials for Teachers of Spelling (Minneapolis, 1959), pp. 76-77.
Another kind of association is using related words:

- define--definite
- politics--political
- relate--relative
- author--authority

The student should be able to distinguish between the prefix and the root of a word. The student often doubles the last letter of the prefix when the root begins with a different letter (as in disappoint) or drops the last letter of the prefix when the root begins with the same letter (as in unnoticed).

The student should correct some spelling errors through training his fingers to write the words correctly. Practicing writing words ending in silent _e and words sounding alike should be helpful. E. G. Ballard, Professor of English at North Texas State University, advocates having the student write a word he usually misspells without seeing it--by writing it on an imaginary sheet of paper held under his desk. Some students who may be confused by seeing or hearing a word can train their fingers in this way.

The student should use a few spelling rules if he finds them helpful. From a survey of twenty textbooks made by Allen Beck, the rules most often included in these texts are

---

35 Hodges and Whitten, p. 172.
the *i.e.* rule, the final *y* rule, the final *e* rule, and the final consonant rule. The problem with spelling rules is that the exceptions often seem to outweigh the rules. The teacher who wants to use spelling rules should mention but not dwell on the exceptions.

These methods of teaching spelling are not always effective. Certainly, spelling is an area which requires further study. Perhaps the linguists will make a significant contribution by discovering effective ways to teach spelling.

**Summary**

When teaching students to revise compositions, instructors should emphasize only those aspects of grammar that are relevant and not present a whole, formal system of grammar. The student must be taught to correct the demon errors, for they block effective communication. Sentence fragments and run-on sentences can obstruct the meaning of the student's theme, making it unintelligible. Errors in subject-verb agreement may not obstruct meaning, but they are thought of as hallmarks of illiteracy. In the same way, spelling errors detract from the value of the student's composition.

---

CHAPTER VI

MATURITY OF STYLE

Rhetoric has recently received new emphasis in many classes of freshman English. Indeed many textbooks similar to Richard M. Weaver's *Rhetoric and Composition* and Neil K. Snortum's *Contemporary Rhetoric* have used rhetoric as the guiding principle of composition. To present rhetorical principles, the teacher of a freshman course in composition needs to know what rhetoric means. According to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, "rhetoric is the art of using language effectively."\(^1\) Edward P. J. Corbett points out that "what all these notions of rhetoric have in common is that rhetoric implies the use or manipulation of words."\(^2\) Sheridan Baker believes that "rhetoric is a kind of angling, a catching of the audience with choice devices. Style is the perfected casting of rhetoric."\(^3\) These definitions relate rhetoric to style. Style involves the choices that

---


a writer makes when expressing himself. This chapter deals with the writer's choices: choices of words and expressions, sentence patterns, and figures of speech. It deals not only with how his choices affect his tone and his level of usage but also with how his choices can relate to those of professional writers with a mature style.

Teaching the student effective choice of words is largely prescriptive in that the teacher asks the student to use the specific word rather than the general, the concrete word rather than the abstract, and the short word rather than the long. According to Don M. Wolfe, the student already has a large stock of specific words in his vocabulary. The teacher can point out that amiable, courteous, and cheerful are more specific adjectives than nice; that saunter, lumber, and waddle are more specific than walk. As James M. McCrimmon points out, the student should be aware that specific words are especially effective in describing sensory experiences. To help students use specific words, the teacher may make a list of such words as

- touching—nubby, clammy;
- tasting—briny, tainted;
- smelling—acrid, woodsy;
- hearing—hiss, pop;
- seeing—inky, bleary.

---


The teacher should also have the student use concrete words whenever possible. Beauty, truth, love, and hate are words the student lives with, but he should try, as Baker advocates, to pin down these abstractions through comparison with concrete words, as Byron does when he compares the abstraction beauty to night:

She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies.

Equally important, the teacher should emphasize the value of the short, direct words. As Winston Weathers and Otis Winchester suggest, the student will, of course, use big words when they are needed: eclectic and onomatopoetic are economical words; arabesque, vacuous, didactic, and malevolent have a pleasing rhythm and can serve as a contrast to the short word. But the student often uses big words in an effort to appear distinguished; however, he usually sounds pretentious. Baker writes, "The minute the beginner tries to sound dignified, in comes a misty layer of words a few feet off the ground and nowhere near heaven . . . words like depart instead of go." The teacher can encourage these students to

---

6 Baker, pp. 154-155.
use short Anglo-Saxon words (like dig, ask, and change) for clarity and simplicity, the long Latin words (delve, question, and transform) occasionally for variety and rhythm.  

In emphasizing specific, concrete, direct language, the teacher is actually asking students to delete the words that damage meaning. Other words and expressions that weaken style, that the student should avoid, are trite expressions and euphemisms. A word or phrase becomes trite through overuse. Porter G. Perrin says that trite expressions can be overworked figures of speech like "irony of fate," "Mother Nature," and "run like a flash"; frayed quotations like "all the world's a stage," and "to be or not to be"; or stock phrases such as "dedicated to the task," "searched far and wide," and "field of endeavor." One way to demonstrate how trite expressions weaken style is for the teacher to give to the student examples from Frank Sullivan's "Cliché Expert" series in The New Yorker.  

Moreover, euphemisms make for puffy writing. Too many freshmen habitually bog down in euphemisms by choosing perspire instead of sweat, underprivileged instead of poor.

10 Ibid.  
and funeral director in place of undertaker. As Paul Roberts says, it is far more effective to "call a fool a fool."  

When striving for exact diction, the student should be taught to give attention to the connotation a word carries, for the reader can have negative or positive reactions to the words a writer chooses. J. N. Hook gives a graphic example of the emotional impact of words by changing only one word in a sentence: "Suppose that a bill is before Congress. If one is neutral toward a bill, he says, 'Congress intends to pass the bill.' If he favors it, he says, 'Congress promises to pass the bill.' If he opposes it, he says, 'Congress threatens to pass the bill.'"  

Merely by the choice of one word (intends, promises, or threatens), the writer may color the intent of his sentences. The student should be taught that words suggest certain images to his reader and that he should choose those words which will elicit the response he wants.

When striving to meet the requirements of a five-hundred word theme, some students actually prefer to use eight or ten words rather than one; these students become redundant, using such word groups as "he is a man who" instead of he. Often these students virtually destroy meaning with their verbosity. Baker points out that wordiness may be the result of using

---


a noun form in modifying another noun ("advance notice" for notice), overusing of ("of an indefinite nature" for indefinite), and using which to add a clause ("a song which was popular last year" for "a song popular last year").

Albert R. Kitzhaber points out that the teacher may have difficulty convincing the student of his own verbosity because the student usually feels that each word he writes is necessary to communicate his thought. By using examples, the teacher may need to show the student how he can eliminate words. The following examples show how the student may delete several words by changing sentence structures:

1. The yacht, which is a status symbol, helps his ego.
   The yacht, a status symbol, helps his ego.

2. That student production, which has been the talk of our campus, has attracted several talent scouts.
   That student production, the talk of our campus, has attracted several talent scouts.

The basis of teaching students to write effective sentences is to make them aware of the variety of choices of sentence structures in English. J. N. Hook and E. G. Mathews list the major patterns, minor patterns, and nonsentences found in modern English. Most important to the teacher is this statement by Hook and Mathews: "There are basically only five

---

15Baker, pp. 161-162.


major patterns, which over ninety per cent of present-day sentences follow. The following is an abridgment of a list presented by Hook and Mathews:

Major Pattern I: Subject and Verb
Basic structure: the simple sentence.
1. Women applauded.
2. The face of Abraham Lincoln looked down earnestly on the delegates.

Major Pattern II: Subject, Verb, and Object
1. We ate hamburgers.
2. Sitting in the car and watching the well-dressed people entering the ritzy restaurant, we sadly ate the hamburgers that were all we could afford.

Major Pattern III: Subject, Verb, and Predicate Nominative.
1. Husbands are mice.
2. Too many husbands in this town are mere mice that fear to venture out when the cat is around.

Major Pattern IV: Subject, Verb, and Predicate Adjective.
1. Helen is beautiful.
2. Because the time element looms so importantly in the newspaper business, publishers have to be highly efficient if they hope to make money.

Major Pattern V: Expletive, Verb (Predicate Adjective), Subject
1. There are traitors in our midst.
2. There are countless statues and carvings, too, in the museums of many lands, which deal with this material.

Hook and Mathews go on to say that the minor sentence patterns consist of questions and inversions; the question patterns are used more frequently. The nonsentences or sentence fragments are used rarely by professional writers. The teacher should concentrate on the basic sentence patterns and may need to


\[19\] Ibid., pp. 79-94.

\[20\] Ibid., p. 95.
show the student how to alter these patterns in various ways. The student may choose to write a simple, a compound, a complex, or a compound-complex sentence—his choice dictating his style.

One way to teach a student various sentence patterns is to have him change one acceptable sentence pattern into another, thereby increasing not only his knowledge of various kinds of sentence structures but also his ability to choose those patterns that best suit his purpose:

From: His temper being snappy, I can understand why they always try to avoid spats with Frank.

To: They always try to avoid spats with Frank: his temper is snappy.  

Teaching a variety of sentence patterns is a major task, but teaching which patterns are most effective in a certain context is even more difficult. Although the teacher may not wish to limit overtly the choice of sentence patterns, he may say, "This is an effective sentence pattern, preferred by professional writers." Nearly all writers of handbooks contend that too many short sentences result in a "choppy" style and that too many long sentences lead to a "stringy" style. Perrin suggests that the student strive for a proper balance, using a simple sentence in a series of longer sentences for emphasis, using a compound sentence for

\[\text{Whitten, p. 140.}\]
rhythmical coordination of similar thoughts, using a complex sentence to demonstrate the exact relationship of thoughts.  

Like Hook and Mathews, Francis Christensen believes that the student should write subject-first sentences most of the time. Student writers should be told that good writers use normal word order about three-fourths of the time. When professional writers use sentence openers, adverbial openers are used most frequently, then coordinating conjunctions, then verbals; inverted word order ranks last.  

When choosing a sentence pattern for special emphasis, the student should be taught that important words should appear at the beginning and end of a sentence. These positions are emphatic. Placing parenthetical elements in these positions may result in unemphatic sentences. Another way to gain emphasis through word order is to arrange ideas in climatic order, with the most important idea last. Anticlimax, arranging ideas in reverse order, may be used for humorous effect.  

Good writers occasionally use a periodic sentence within a series of loose sentences. According to Weathers and Winchester, the loose sentence, in which the main idea comes

---

first and details come after, is the most common form of
eexpression; one's thoughts are formed most naturally and
easily into loose sentences. The periodic sentence, which
suspends the completion of the main thought until the end,
should be used by the student when he wants to gain emphasis
and suspense for the main idea. The teacher may want to use
an example to show how writers gain suspense by using a
periodic sentence such as this sentence by Thomas Hardy:

One evening, about three weeks after the funeral
of Mrs. Yeobright, when the silver face of the
moon sent a bundle of beams directly upon the
floor of Clymn's house at Alderworth, a woman came
from within.

Hardy could have chosen to put his main clause first, but
the emphasis in his sentence would have been changed. The
teacher can have the student practice this technique of
professional writing by having him convert loose sentences
into periodic sentences.

If a student can be taught the art of balancing phrase
with phrase, clause with clause, and sentence with sentence,
he will have acquired an element of style that makes for
both smoothness and rhythm. Baker writes, "This is what
parallel thinking brings--balance and control and an eye for
sentences that seem intellectual totalities, as if struck
out all at once from the uncut rock." Using a modern example

25 Weather and Winchester, pp. 157-159.
26 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, 1964),
p. 307.
of parallel structure, like the one below, may reach more students than the usual textbook examples do:

For a minute or so he felt completely removed
from the war,
from the rain,
from everything;
he knew that in a little while he would be having
to consider where and how he would sleep, but for this brief moment he sang resolutely,

wriggling his toes,
letting all the soft sensuous memories that
the songs evoked flow unresisting through
his mind.28

The virtue of teaching the student to use the active voice is expounded in most textbooks. Although the student is told that the passive voice is noncommittal and wordy and that the active voice is more forceful and direct, he frequently persists in using the passive voice. One remedy for this persistence is to teach the student when the passive voice may be used effectively. Weathers and Winchester cite these instances for using the passive voice:

...to emphasize the receiver of the action rather than, as the active voice does, the doer of the action. If navigation were your subject you would write:

A form of stellar navigation was used by the ancient Phoenicians.

And if the Phoenicians were your subject,

The ancient Phoenicians used a form of stellar navigation.

...to shift the real subject to the end position where it can sometimes be more easily modified,

The Ossianic poems were actually written by James Macpherson, a talented literary forger who apparently made use of genuine Celtic tradition but composed most of the epic Fingal himself.

to give the effect of detachment,

She was left waiting at the door of the church. (By whom is unimportant.)

and sometimes to make the thought easier to phrase.

It is simpler to write, "A horse can be taught to stand when the reing are dropped," than any equivalent in the active voice.29

The student should regularly use the active voice. If he wants to use the passive voice, he should be taught to use it for one of the instances given.

Teaching the student to use figurative language can add color and liveliness to his compositions. Figures of speech can be effective in illustrating an experience, creating a visual image, or giving concreteness to abstract thoughts. Although over two hundred figures of speech have been classified30 only those which the student is most likely to use in his writing should be emphasized in the classroom.

The teacher should show the student how to use the simile and metaphor effectively. In discussing these figures of speech, Herbert Read divides them into two groups: decorative and illuminative. Decorative comparisons, used to display poetic tendency or to give further expression of an already direct statement, are out of place in the student's

29 Weathers and Winchester, pp. 160-161.
30 Corbett, p. 425.
composition. The student should be taught to use a simile or metaphor only when abstract language will not express his meaning clearly. Then the comparison is used to illuminate his thought. The student should be taught the weakness of a comparison used as a decorative device and its value as an illustration of his ideas. Donald J. Lloyd uses a simile when he describes the process of writing:

Correct! That's what we've got to be, and the idea we've got to be correct rests like a soggy blanket on our brains and hands whenever we try to write.  

Irony is a figure of speech in which the actual intent of a thought is expressed with words of opposite meaning. As Nadine Ricks and Marilyn Marsh point out, the student is already familiar with irony; he uses it when he exclaims to a friend, "You don't mean it!" If the student is made aware that he does use irony, he may be encouraged to use it in his writing. Paul W. Merrill uses irony in this advice to students:

The average student finds it surprisingly easy to acquire the usual tricks of poor writing. To do a consistently poor job, however, one must grasp a few essential principles:

I. Ignore the reader.

II. Be verbose, vague, and pompous.

III. Do not revise.

31 Frederick Candelaria, editor, Perspectives on Style (Boston, 1968), pp. 26-27.


33 Ibid., p. 195.

34 Ibid., p. 353.
Personification is a figure of speech which gives human qualities to non-human objects. Ricks and Marsh suggest that since the student is already aware of the hackneyed personifications ("Father Time," "Arm of Fate"), he should be encouraged to be more original, following the examples of good writers.\(^{35}\) Mortimer J. Adler uses personification when he writes, "But the soul of the book can be separated from its body."\(^{36}\)

An allusion is a figure of speech which refers to a familiar event, place, or person. As Baker points out, an allusion depends on using the familiar.\(^{37}\) Perhaps this figure is one of the easiest for a student to use, since he can draw upon his general knowledge to illustrate his ideas, following the example of S. I. Hayakawa, who wrote: "Henry Jones in love with Anne is not Robert Browning in love with Elizabeth Barrett."\(^{38}\)

When teaching the student which words, sentence patterns, and figures of speech are most effective, the instructor may sometimes show how choices affect the tone and level of usage in compositions. Brooks and Warren define tone as the stance the writer takes in expressing his attitude toward his subject and his reader. The writer's tone may be serious, humorous,

\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 197.  \(^{36}\)Ibid.

\(^{37}\)Baker, p. 158.

\(^{38}\)Ricks and Marsh, p. 197.
enthusiastic, understated, ironical, formal, or informal. When teaching the student to make those stylistic choices which are appropriate to the stance he takes, the teacher can offer a few guidelines.

Hans P. Guth advises the student to write with sincerity. Insincerity results from trying to please the reader with cant phrases. Guth also advises the student to avoid sentimentality, especially the affected sentimentality that is prevalent in popular fiction, motion pictures, and soap operas. The student should not over dramatize by using exclamation marks, dashes, ellipses, or words like tremendous, magnificent, and perfect. The student should convey emotion straightforwardly, without fanfare. Brooks and Warren further add that the student should not "write down" to his readers by using statements which are overly simple or carefully explained. Neither should the student adopt a false enthusiasm or breezy manner similar to that prevalent in advertising.

Although levels of usage are part of tone, they deserve special attention. Weathers and Winchester say that three levels may be acceptable in the student's composition: formal, informal, and colloquial. The formal level of writing

---

41 Brooks and Warren, pp. 372-373.
consists of more formal diction, words outside everyday usage, and more substantial constructions, including complex and periodic sentences. The informal level consists of a medium-quality diction, blending Anglo-Saxon and Latin words, some contractions, and some popular idioms. Sentences on the informal level are loose, for the most part, with an occasional periodic sentence. The colloquial level uses ordinary words, many contractions, slang phrases, and the impersonal you. The sentences are predominantly loose, either simple or rambling compounds. The teacher should emphasize levels of usage so that the student can adjust his writing to his reader and his subject.

One effective method of teaching the student how to set his tone and make effective choices is to expose him to the mature style of professional writers. William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White believe that the student may discover why a particular style is effective by rewriting famous quotations. Strunk and White provide an example by rewriting "These are the times that try men's souls":

Times like these try men's souls.
How trying it is to live in these times!
These are trying times for men's souls.
Soulwise, these are trying times. 42

42 Weathers and Winchester, pp. 109-114.

Corbett believes that when the student carefully copies passages written by professionals, he becomes aware of the style of the passage. Corbett offers a few simple rules. To avoid boredom, the student should not copy passages for more than twenty minutes at a sitting. The student should not use a typewriter; he should use his fingers to copy slowly. He should not devote too much time to any one author. To get a sense of the style as a whole, he should read the entire passage before he writes.\textsuperscript{44}

Some authorities believe that a student can perfect his own style by imitating the style of good writers. Wolfe suggests that the student write original sentences based on distinguished models which could be chosen to teach grammatical structure or figures of speech. The student should imitate the language of the model sentence, using colorful modifiers and exact nouns and verbs.\textsuperscript{45}

Corbett includes in Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student both model sentences and short passages for the student to imitate.\textsuperscript{46} These examples are a handy reference for the teacher who wishes to teach style through imitation. Winifred Lynskey suggests these authors for the student to imitate: Swift, to teach satire and irony: Macaulay, to teach parallelism,

\textsuperscript{44}Corbett, pp. 465-466.
\textsuperscript{45}Wolfe, pp. 211-212.
\textsuperscript{46}Corbett, pp. 467-491.
effective repetition, balance and antithesis, and allusion and climax; Leigh Hunt, to teach the use of concrete detail and vividness in writing. 47

Summary

The English instructor should help freshmen develop a mature style. He should present as wide a variety of choices as possible, choices involving words, phrases, sentence patterns, and figures of speech. These choices will affect the tone of composition. The teacher may want the student to imitate the choices which professional writers make. The teacher's basic concern is to show the student how his compositions may be most effective. Perhaps the teaching of style is the most vital aspect of teaching the college freshmen to write.

47 Winifred Lynskey, "Imitative Writing and a Student's Style," College English, XVIII (May, 1957), 397-399.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Candelaria, Frederick, editor, Perspectives on Style, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1968.


Ricks, Nadine and Marilyn Marsh, Patterns in English, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963.


Articles

Baum, Bernard, "Some Thoughts on Teaching Grammar to Improve Writing," College Composition and Communication, XVIII (February, 1967), 2-6.


Heath, William W., "Freshman English at Amherst College," The CEA Critic, XXI (October, 1959), 1, 10-12.

Ives, Sumner, "Linguistics in the Classroom," College English, XVII (December, 1965), 165-172.

Lynskey, Winifred, "Imitative Writing and a Student's Style," College English, XVIII (May, 1957), 396-400.


Reports


Unpublished Materials
