

Chapter Four

Revising and Editing Myths, Metaphors, and Multisensory Strategies

Usage can be defined neutrally as the customary ways in which things are done in written discourse. A more biased and yet more accurate definition is this: usage rules are the conventions of written English that allow Americans to discriminate against one another. Questions of usage are tied to social attitudes about who is intelligent and well-educated, and who is not.

—Sharon Crowley
and Deborah Hawhee¹

I begin this chapter with a sigh. With contradictions chattering in my head. Grammar is important. No it isn't. Yes it is, but not in the way most people think. It's oppressive and useless to "teach" it. It's oppressive to think we can just ignore it. Some people just "get" it. Some people don't. It's a minor issue. It's a major issue. Our colleagues think it's our job to "teach grammar." What do they really mean when they say that? How can I help my students, my colleagues, and my contemporaries in the general public to see all the arguments about grammar, the complexities of its controversies, before I begin to give advice about issues of grammar? How can I even step far enough away from it myself to get a useful overview? The problem is, "grammar" becomes an

issue instantly, even as I type this “freewrite” to get me into this chapter. I just went back and corrected “away” because I initially typed “awry”—a subliminal message, perhaps, that I should not correct but expand. So that’s just one small issue—the kind of interruptions Peter Elbow points out that people constantly make as they write. Did I lose a priceless gem of thought as I went back and corrected the typo? Probably not. But you never know. I do have suggestions for using multi-sensory strategies to address issues of grammar. But first some sighs, some disclaimers, some overviews, and some contradictions.

There are many reasons for what Crowley and Hawhee have called “Americans’ obsession with correctness and clarity” (1999, 263), only some of which will be explored here. Any venturing into revising and editing territories is bound to be selective, incomplete, and controversial, confronting as it must old but ongoing debates about grammar, process pedagogy, and direct versus indirect instruction. However, decisions about how, when, or whether to help students revise and edit are complex ones, inextricably related to conscious or unconscious assumptions about language and learning. Many of the theoretical and practical problems discussed here may be considered to be long-buried by some. I exhume them here first to argue that the very complexity of these issues prevents them from being resolved once and for all, and, further, that their vexing refusal to stay buried can invigorate our pedagogies by forcing us to re-visit and re-articulate the reasons we do what we do (or don’t do). As Paulo Freire understood, uncertainties demand rethinkings. In other words, instead of groaning when yet another voice laments our students’ perceived lack of grammar or our perceived refusal to teach it, we should embrace these ghosts for the opportunity they provide to debate with them (and again with ourselves) the conundrums these issues present.

Cleaning out the Closet

To switch the metaphor yet again: When we clean our revising and editing closet, we should put all our research and ideologies on the bed as we might our clothes, sorting through the treasured heirlooms, the cheap fads, and the hand-me-downs, before we add our new sneakers. This sorting involves both embarrassing and pleasurable rediscoveries, as well as some painful decisions. The more often we do it, the better.

Furthermore, dragging one thing out of the closet can sometimes bring other things tumbling down on our heads. These tangential oddities interrupt our sorting and invite us to examine the T-shirt from Alaska, the yellow gingham draft doggie, or the letter stashed in the

corner behind the tap shoes. Likewise, reopening the grammar closet forces us to examine what lurks behind our public stance on revising, editing, and “correctness.”

We must interrogate our assumptions and try to understand what we’re doing and why, what a well-edited piece of writing does and does not indicate, why “correctness” is neither simple nor ideologically neutral, but associated in powerful ways to ethos, class status, and social constructions of taste and even morality. We must reexamine—and help our students see—how perceived correctness in writing is like perceived correctness in wardrobe style, related more to context than to stable rules.

*Difficult Decisions About What
Comes out of the Closet: Process Pedagogy*

A good place to begin this complex discussion about revising, editing, and how or whether to teach writing conventions, is with Lisa D. Delpit’s candid, controversial critique of process pedagogy that appeared in the August 1988 *Harvard Educational Review*. In her essay, Delpit rightly argued that classrooms and writing pedagogies are about issues of power, and that some students already have, because of their middle- or upper-class social class status, “more accoutrements of the culture of power already in place” than those from a lower social class (285). Among these accoutrements are internalized rules about academic behavior, from how to dress to how to adhere to constructed grammar and usage conventions. In order to be successful, Delpit argues, students must already have, or learn, these conventions. She further argues that explicit teaching is the best way for them to learn.

In Keith Gilyard’s 1996 critique of Delpit’s article, he tells us that he deliberately uses the past tense to summarize her argument because, he says, “I don’t presume she holds those exact views today.” He also presents her views in the past tense in order to “stress my use of them as historical reference points that merely tip an iceberg of contemporary dialectics about writing-process pedagogy” (1996a, 90). It’s also clear that by “dispens[ing] with the academic convention of writing about her texts in the present tense,” Gilyard is also subtly pointing out the constructed nature of that convention regarding verb tense, even as he takes issue with and expands that convention. In my continued summary of Delpit, I follow Gilyard’s lead and deliberately use past tense.

Delpit argued that using process pedagogy for revising and editing matters, with its emphasis on peer group response (as opposed to directive teacher commentary), leaves too much for students to figure out indirectly. It relies on an osmosis that might never occur, leaving

students who come to class without power still searching at the end of the class for the “cultural capital” that their classmates come already possessing. “If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (283). This difference in pedagogical approaches is related to issues of revising and editing because it has to do with perceived issues of “grammar,” “correctness,” “usage,” and the like.

Delpit was critiquing a process pedagogy of discovery (or an interpretation of one) that was popular in the 1980s, a representation of which can be seen in Lil Brannon’s and Gordon Pradl’s “The Socialization of Writing Teachers,” which appeared in *The Journal of Basic Writing* in 1984:

Teachers do not have knowledge to impart, nor do they hold the answers to how the writing can be improved. Only the writers can discover new ways of clarifying their meanings, and this discovery can be quickened and enhanced by the questioning reader. Teachers, then, are collaborators, readers among a group of readers, persons who reflect back to the writer what they have heard, what they expect to hear, what they wish to know more about. They are not authoritarians, guardians of standard written English, correctors of essays but participants in a community of writers, taking a stance which reinforces both teacher’s and students’ writing groups. (36–37)

Criticizing extreme forms of pedagogies that assume students will implicitly figure out codes and rules of writing and academia as they become immersed in both, Delpit maintained that students from “non-middle-class homes” should be told explicitly what is expected in school and in writing, which reflects middle- and upper-class cultural assumptions in ways that are often invisible. To illustrate her point, she used the following anecdote:

When I lived in several Papua New Guinea villages for extended periods to collect data, and when I go to Alaskan villages for work with Alaskan Native communities, I have found it unquestionably easier—psychologically and pragmatically—when some kind soul has directly informed me about such matters as appropriate dress, interactional styles, embedded meanings, and taboo words or actions. I contend that it is much the same for anyone seeking to learn the rules of the culture of power. Unless one has had the leisure of a lifetime of “immersion” to learn them, explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier. (283)

In addressing the controversy that Delpit’s article ignited, Gilyard observes that in spite of its title, “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and

Pedagogy in *Educating Other People's Children*," this piece had the ironic effect of silencing "much of the audience she was imploring to speak" (87). He said many white teachers felt they could not defend process writing because "Delpit had played the so-called race card, positing a variation of the basic argument 'I'm Black, so I know what's best for Black kids'" (89). Gilyard critiques Delpit for not providing details of the bad instruction she cites as evidence for her views. He argues that "specifying the tenets of such instruction" would re-open and keep open a necessary discussion of process pedagogy and its appropriateness for all students (89). Toward that end, Gilyard further critiques Delpit for "unnecessary binarism and reductionism" in her depiction of process writing. Drawing on Steven Zemelman's and Harvey Daniels' list of fifteen qualities that characterize process writing, Gilyard provides a richer, more complete description of it (90–91). He also agrees with Zemelman and Daniels that "it is profoundly, dangerously, insidiously wrong" (1993, 355) to think we will find one "right way" to teach every child (Gilyard 1996a, 91). One of my reasons for selecting the Delpit/Gilyard essay pair is to draw attention to the need for ongoing examinations of complex issues and the need to avoid a search for one answer.

Although Gilyard initially critiques what he sees as Delpit's narrow conception and rejection of process writing pedagogy, he ultimately calls brilliant her analysis of the real issue underlying this controversy about teaching. That real issue is "the culture of power" (94). Gilyard agrees with Delpit about "the need to explicitly teach African American students the linguistic and cultural codes that may enable more effective participation by them in the wider realms of language and power" (94).

When we clean out the revising/editing closet, what should hit us on the head is the role power plays in what we usually think of as "minor" issues. As Delpit put it: "Those with power are frequently the least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence" (283). To paraphrase Delpit, "grammar" issues are minor only to those for whom it is not an issue.

In *Defending Access*, Tom Fox raises a more ominous possibility about issues of power. He says debates about language "standards" are not really about neutral questions of literacy: "I want to argue specifically and strongly against the narrow view that the crisis of access is caused mainly by underpreparation or a lack of literacy skills on the part of students of color" (10).

As we shall see, in further discussions in this chapter about revising and editing, many controversies that seem to be about "minor" issues

of grammar, punctuation, syntax, usage, and “surface correctness,” are really about power: who has it, who doesn’t, who wants it, who likes to flaunt it, who may not want to share it, and who may prefer to disguise it as simply an issue of “correctness.”

Wardrobe as Code for Intelligence

When we clean out our closets, we not only sort the cool clothes from the absurd ones, we get a sense of our histories: why we thought we could wear such a thing ten years ago, and why we must use it today as a dust rag. We may also rethink the role clothing plays in society, a role also related to power, as well as who stands to gain or lose by the unspoken societal codes that clothing represents. Whose interests are served by the style and comfort level of this clothing? What do we gain and lose by adhering to its unspoken codes? As Gilyard, Delpit, and Fox argue implicitly, we need to ask similar questions about the societal codes that support our stance toward writing style and comfort level, revising and editing, standards and correctness.

Our literacy-loving society has unspoken codes about surface correctness; that is, having one’s spelling, punctuation, and usage ducks in a row, something that students no doubt know intuitively. But these unspoken codes and assumptions should be voiced so that they can be accounted for or challenged. Unfortunately, readers often link surface correctness with “good writing,” which they then link with “good taste,” or at least taste perceived to be good, even higher on a moral scale, by those in the privileged class. They also link “good writing” with intelligence.

The assumptions linking surface correctness with intelligence are perhaps so pervasive that they are invisible. But there are indicators: Students who make the most surface errors (in the form of breaches of usage, grammar, spelling, or punctuation conventions) end up in the lowest-track writing classes, as if spelling and punctuation errors were the footprints of inadequate thinking. There are indicators in the way too many of us meet the “They can’t-even-write-a-complete-sentence!” mantras of our colleagues with shaking heads and post-lapsarian laments. There are indicators in the way students’ malapropisms are collected and posted on office doors or gleefully forwarded through e-mail and listservs, as if proof of students’ stupidity and professors’ superiority. As Crowley and Hawhee have pointed out, this linking of literacy and intelligence was not always thus: “Ancient rhetoricians would be very surprised by the modern association of intelligence and education with literacy—the ability to read and write” (275). In *Composition in the*

University, Crowley shows how contemporary assumptions about “correctness” and intelligence are not new. She cites Brainerd Kellogg’s 1893 view that

one’s English is already taken as the test and measure of his culture—he is known by the English he keeps. To mistake his words (even to mispronounce them or to speak them indistinctly), to huddle them as a mob into sentences, *to trample on plain rules of grammar, to disregard the idioms of the language,—these things, all or severally, disclose the speaker’s intellectual standing.* One’s English betrays his breeding, tells what society he frequents, and determines what doors are open to him or be closed against him. (my emphasis; 63)

Even in late-20th century articles, it is not difficult to find this presumed association between surface features of a text and its writer’s intelligence. In 1981, Stephen P. Witte and Lester Faigley analyzed the textual features of high-rated and low-rated student essays, summarizing and commenting on the findings. Among other things, Witte and Faigley found that the low-rated essays exhibited a limited vocabulary, which was inadequate for writers to expand or give examples of ideas in their papers. Although they wonder whether a writer’s invention skills may be related to vocabulary “in ways yet unexplored” (198), Witte and Faigley go on to assume that a person’s vocabulary as evident in a written text can be taken as evidence of that person’s complete vocabulary: “If students do not have in their working vocabularies the lexical items required to extend, explore, or elaborate the concepts they introduce, practice in invention can only have a limited effect on overall writing quality” (198). While Witte and Faigley may be right that a sophisticated vocabulary helps people add the “lexical collocations” (elaborations and examples) that were valued by readers when they separated the high- from the low-rated essays, they should consider the possibility that for some students, writing does *not* provide the best opportunity to show working vocabularies or collocations.

As writing center tutors often discover, a student who has trouble *writing* about ideas may be able to *speak* about them at length when questioned orally. It may very well be that for Compositionists, writing *is* the best vehicle for showing off what we know. But we cannot assume that is the case for everyone. There could be other reasons a student’s writing does not display a sophisticated vocabulary, for example. One possibility is that the student does know other words, but is so afraid of misspelling them that she sticks with simpler words. She may have been asked to produce the writing quickly and did not have the time needed to recall the terms she knows but cannot quickly remember. She may have to move around or to talk through her ideas before she has access to the words she wants. Or she may occasionally confuse

them with other words, producing the malapropisms that too many of her friends, relatives, or teachers have taken delight in pointing out. She has learned too well how wrong words or misspelled ones will be received by her readers, how they will judge her intelligence by them, so she does not take the risk of using any but the most mundane words, the ones she'll recall, use correctly, and spell right. Or, she uses a thesaurus, and retrieves the perfect word—but not for the particular sentence at hand—and her work announces its author as a barbarian at the gate.

As Composition instructors, we are invested in writing. We see it as an intellectual tool because it functions like one reliably for us most of the time. But we should not see writing as an automatic gauge of every student's thinking process, any more than we would want our thinking processes judged by how well we solve a calculus problem, drive the streets of Boston, or do a cartwheel.

The Thesaurus as Bad Fashion Consultant

In my past work as a writing center tutor and then director, I have advised many students not to use a thesaurus. They use one, they tell me, because they know that a sophisticated vocabulary is valued by readers, or because someone has told them not to repeat the same word throughout an essay. When they turn to a thesaurus for a synonym, they often pick a word they recognize, but have never used before in a sentence. The result is often a sentence faux pas, which backfires on the writer, drawing attention not to her skills as a sophisticated language user but as an amateur open to ridicule. The line here is a narrow, cruel one. "Big words" used right say one thing about a writer; used wrong they announce that she is not in the club, like shining a spotlight on a ripped seam or the cheese dribbled on a shirt.

To help such students tap into ways to further develop their work, I try to get them talking about their project. If we run out of time, I advise them to talk or argue about the issue with a roommate or friend, to get their thoughts activated and to write down or record what came to mind. There are now reasonably priced computer-chip recorders that store voice notes without audio tapes. If we do have time during the session to talk, students usually come up with much to add to their draft, in language that is both sophisticated and familiar to them. What strikes me is how well students have learned society's lesson about vocabulary level, word use, written language, and intelligence. They are wise to be afraid of writing. It's no wonder that they hate it.

As writing teachers, we forget how much we know, how much we've read, how comfortable we are, most of the time, with written

language. We forget how routine, if not easy, it is for us to analyze who will be reading our text, to think about ways we can appeal, rhetorically, to that audience. We forget the confidence we have (mostly) in beginning a writing project, struggling with it, even as we know it's going to be a struggle, re-working it again and again as we negotiate our own or our readers' critiques. We finish the thing, or at least we stop working on it. We send it off in an envelope, or we press "Send." We know how it feels to have finished many, many writing projects, more or less successfully. And yet even we, who have had years of successful writing and revising experience, have doubts and fears. How many times as I worked on this project have I painted my toenails, pored over grocery store flyers, watered the already sodden plants, checked the mail, stared at the fish tank, or even made the bed—anything to avoid sitting back down at the computer? Why? I think because I'm afraid. Afraid I'll have a writer's block. Afraid that I won't. Afraid of what I won't write. Afraid of what I will. If I, who have many years of mostly good memories of writing behind me, have such terrors of writing, what terrors must haunt my students, especially those whose drafts are so full of ripped seams and cheese dribbles?

Outward Appearances, Wardrobe Faux Pas, and Taste

In his well-known 1981 CCC essay, "The Phenomenology of Error," Joseph Williams wonders why usage choices such as "irregardless" and "hopefully" are judged with such "unusual ferocity" and seen as "horrible atrocities" (152). Williams goes on to point out "errors" in the very handbooks that warn about them. He makes the vivid point that readers "find" errors in those texts in which they expect to find them (i.e., ones written by students), but they do not look for, and therefore do not see, errors in texts where they do not expect to find them (i.e., grammar handbooks). His point is that "error" is a phenomenon of context, a matter of who is reading whose writing for what purpose.

Early on in his essay, Williams discusses common grammar and usage errors and argues that they are like social gaffes in some ways, but unlike them in that they do not violate personal or psychic space in the way that "defective social behavior" does, such as spilling coffee on someone or telling a racist joke. He wonders "why so much heat is invested in condemning a violation whose consequence impinges not at all on our personal space?" (153). "But no matter how 'atrocious' or 'horrible' or 'illiterate' we think an error like *irregardless* or a

like for an *as* might be, it does not jolt my ear in the same way an elbow might" (153).

However, it might be argued that the minor linguistic "errors" Williams describes *do* violate the personal space of some readers in ways that have to do with social class and taste. Williams comes close to saying as much when he points out that the degree of hostility with which those errors are greeted must be due to "deep psychic forces" we do not completely understand. These "errors," minor though they are, are the leisure suits of language use: instant signs of social class and education, ways to determine who belongs to the club and who does not. In ways readers might not consciously realize, a writer who uses "irregardless" or "between you and I" might be viewed as an interloper who must be stopped at the door, a crasher of an academic party, like a female professor wearing a sunflower-print tent dress to a job interview. The word choices and kinds of errors people make are bullhorns announcing that they haven't been to the right dinner parties, read the right journals, or avoided the right theme parks.

As Sharon Crowley points out, our views of taste stem from 18th-century European notions of it as something that a person is either born with or not, yet also something that 19th-century rhetoric texts nevertheless attempted to teach (1995, 12–13). Her anecdote about food preference is a wonderful way to explain language use as an issue of learned taste. On a road trip through the Midwest, she was reminded that her current taste for "espresso coffee and olive oil" was acquired during her years of living in the West, just as a penchant for "orange Jell-O salad with carrots inside and mayonnaise on top" is a learned taste in another part of the country (11).

Tracing traditions of taste through Alexander Pope, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth-century and then focusing on Hugh Blair and the influence his work had on the nineteenth-century "pedagogy of taste," Crowley argues that taste functions primarily to discriminate and exclude: "The pedagogy of taste helps students to internalize a set of rules that mark their inclusion in bourgeois subjectivity at the same time it sets them off from members of other classes" (18). Crowley goes on to argue that the mandatory first-year composition course of today is also implicated in "the maintenance and promulgation of bourgeois subjectivity," and that students in those courses who are not from upper or middle classes "will find their differences continually remarked by such instruction" (19).

Crowley's point here indirectly answers Joseph Williams' musing above regarding why a certain grammar and usage "violation" (such as "irregardless") is met with such "ferocity" when it does not violate our personal space. Nor does it make the sentence less clear. What it does

make more clear, however, is the writer's social or educational class, which may cause some readers to see it as a more alarming violation: of one social class attempting to impinge on the personal space, or cultural capital, of another. So the middle- or upper-class reader delights in seeking out and exposing the tiniest departures from linguistic conventions, but only, as Williams points out, if they come from those outside the circle, such as students. Insiders and perceived authorities, such as handbook writers, can make the same departures and they are literally not even noticed.

Citing reader-response theory, C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon also point out that readers' conception of the authority of a writer impacts how they perceive his or her text. Further, when given the authority to evaluate a text, readers will readily do so, usually negatively, and they will typically "cite any idiosyncrasy of form or technique, idea or style, any authorial choice that challenges their personal preferences, as an 'error'" (1984, 161). What's more, Tom Fox argues that "errors" in language use are inevitably linked with moral flaws: "Literacy studies in the last ten years have effectively demonstrated that what gets called illiterate is historically and socially contingent and that the charge of illiteracy carries with it a potent charge of moral unfitness" (43).

"Proper" English as Ticket to Ride

Whether "proper English" can get an outsider into privileged circles is itself debatable. Richard Rodriguez believes that English is the ticket to participation in mainstream American culture (*Hunger for Memory*). Victor Villanueva (1987) takes issue with Rodriguez's view that in spite of the sacrifices in lost culture a child makes when he or she learns "Anglais," the benefits of acceptance outweigh the loss in cultural separation from family and home community. Villanueva argues that discrimination in the United States involves more than the niceties of language used by the people being discriminated against. He makes a distinction between a group he calls "immigrants," who *chose* to come to the United States (or whose ancestors did), and a group he calls "minorities," people in the United States whose ancestors were colonized or enslaved. Villanueva points out that "some ethnic minorities have not been assimilated in the way the Ellis Islanders were" (18) and he uses an analogy about food to illustrate this difference:

Who speaks of a German-American sausage, for instance? It's a hot dog. Yet tacos remain ethnic, sold under a mock Spanish mission bell or a sombrero. You will find refried beans under "ethnic foods"

in the supermarket, not among other canned beans, though items as foreign-sounding as sauerkraut are simply canned vegetables. Mexican foods, even when as Americanized as the taco salad or Mexican-Velveeta, remain distinctly Mexican. (18)

With another anecdote, Villanueva continues his objection to the commonplace of “proper English” as ticket to ride, this one about his father searching for an apartment in uptown New York. When the landlord heard Villanueva’s father using “the sounds of a Spanish speaker attempting his best English,” there were no vacancies. However, when his father said the family was from Spain, there was suddenly an opening. The initial pronouncement of “no vacancy” Villanueva thinks was due to stereotypical views of Puerto Ricans. The sudden opening was due to the instant transformation, in the landlord’s eyes, of Villanueva’s father from “minority” to “immigrant.” As Villanueva puts it: “The immigrant could enter where the minority could not. My father’s English hadn’t improved in the five minutes it had taken for the situation to change” (20). Many students struggle to improve their writing, believing “good English” is the key to success. To a certain extent, this belief is supported. However, students should be privy to socioeconomic factors quietly manipulating people’s reactions to other people—because of, or in spite of, their language use.

Myths About the “Grammar” Wardrobe

In a 1985 *College English* article, Patrick Hartwell summarizes the previous seventy-five years’ worth of grammar research and debate, especially Braddocks’, Lloyd-Jones’, and Schoer’s 1963 study showing the uselessness of direct formal grammar instruction.² Hartwell also shows how suspicion of such research, as well as rehearsals of recurring “literacy crises,” are the forces that re-ignite grammar debates, causing all discussions of “grammar,” to begin, once again, at the beginning. Hartwell highlights studies that suggest direct grammar teaching, which he sees as “embedded in larger models of the transmission of literacy” (108), has little effect on the quality of student writing. He says that people interpret research the way they want to and that more experimental research will not resolve the debate (106–107).

Drawing on W. Nelson Francis’ 1954 distinction among “three meanings of grammar,” Hartwell adds two more, for a total of five:

- Grammar 1 is the internalized grammatical rules that enable even two-year-olds to speak in grammatically correct sentences, having no formal knowledge of the names of the structures being used.

Hartwell calls this “the grammar in our heads” (111), though I want to return later to Hartwell’s use of “our” and the assumptions he seems to be making about who “we” are.

- Grammar 2 is linguistics, the formal study of patterns.
- Grammar 3 is what W. Nelson Francis called “linguistic etiquette”; Hartwell calls it “usage” and acknowledges Joseph Williams’ problematizing of how usage is wielded in our society (see above). Using more direct language, Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee define usage as “the conventions of written English that allow Americans to discriminate against one another” (1999, 283).
- Grammar 4 is one of Hartwell’s subdivisions of Grammar 2, which he calls “American structuralist grammar” or “the grammars used in the schools” (1985, 110). Here Hartwell cites Charlton Laird’s description of this grammar as “the grammar of Latin, ingeniously warped to suggest English” (1970, 294). Crowley and Hawhee also point out that traditional grammar teaching sometimes imposes Latin rules on English, for example the “rule” against split infinitives, which made sense in Latin, but not in English (283).
- Grammar 5 is another division of Grammar 2, which is “grammatical terms used in the interest of teaching prose style.” These terms vary, Hartwell argues, depending on the handbook used to teach them (110).

Hartwell’s lengthy description of the five “grammars” gives names to various complexities of this issue, making it easier to talk about with students or with interested members of the academic or public community. The following statement from his article is a lucid summary of his position:

Thus if we think seriously about error and its relationship to the worship of formal grammar study, we need to attempt some massive dislocation of our traditional thinking, to shuck off our hyperliterate perception of the conscious knowledge that our theory of language gives us. (Hartwell 1985, 121)

His comments here and above (“the grammar in our head”) about “our” raises questions about who “we” are. Does everyone have the same internalized structure of English? Do all children internalize those structures in the same way and at the same time? Can implicit learning be enhanced for some students by selected explicit learning or teaching? As Lisa Delpit has suggested, these are questions that have not been fully explored. Hartwell is probably right that more experimental research will no doubt be designed, carried out, and interpreted according to people’s preexisting assumptions (conscious or uncon-

scious) about language and grammar, and will therefore not answer questions once and for all. However, as Composition instructors who have spent much of our time and intellectual energy focused on language and issues of language, we need to take care not to assume that our ease and pleasure with written language will be the same for all our students, if only they become engaged with critical social issues. We must ask who is speaking when talking about “*our* theory of language,” and “the grammar in *our* heads” (my emphasis). We must examine those phrases for their assumed universality.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, questions that need to be raised here, Hartwell’s article is a good base from which to “begin at the beginning.” His essay would be an appropriate common text for these discussions because, unlike many academic arguments, Hartwell’s research is drawn from a variety of disciplines: reading, experimental psychology, linguistics, and teaching English as a second language. As I have argued elsewhere, we need to expand our research circle into other fields, even more than we currently do—not to find answers, but to ask more sophisticated questions about how we are dealing with “the grammar issue” in our classrooms, teacher-training programs, and interactions with the public.

In addition to “issues of grammar,” there are other aspects of revising and editing, sometimes presented as “rules,” which are really more like myths or folk beliefs. One concerns “topic sentences.” Over a quarter-century ago, Richard Braddock’s study of twenty-five essays picked at random from respected journals such as *Harpers* and *The New Yorker* suggested that the conventional textbook claims regarding the existence and placement of “topic” sentences in an essay could not be substantiated (296–301). It’s not that Braddock’s study is the last word on topic sentences. It’s not that topic sentences don’t exist or are not useful in ways the grammar books claim. But sometimes academic or public laments about students’ perceived ignorance regarding topic sentences proceed as if Braddock never complicated the issue. Mostly there isn’t even a discussion, only an assumption that published writing has such things as topic sentences and that student writing should have more of them.

One way to address both legitimate concerns and myths about topic sentences is to use Richard Beach’s suggestion that writers identify (either out loud to a peer or by writing in the margins) what each paragraph or section of a draft is doing: what it *shows* rather than what it *says* (in Anson 1989, 133). This by itself might suggest revising ideas because it forces writers to look not at individual sentences, but to step back and look at the piece holistically and then by section and paragraph. It helps them relate parts to whole. The Tinkertoy work described in Chapter 3 might accomplish the same thing with appropriate

prompts. Writers might do these or similar exercises after having just read or heard about Braddock's research on topic sentences.

Students should also be made aware of controversies in Composition about stylistic advice. Over twenty years ago, Richard Ohmann questioned widely accepted grammar handbook advice to "use definite, specific, concrete language" (390). Pointing to an "ideology of style" that admonishes students to fill their essays with concrete details, Ohmann argues that we may be stifling a more meaningful, metaphorical style. His decades-old statement about power is still relevant: "in the cause of improving their skills, we may end up increasing their powerlessness" (396–97).

Students should also know about Stephen P. Witte's and Lester Faigley's studies of high-rated and low-rated essays—and their implications. In general Witte and Faigley found "that high-rated essays are longer and contain larger T-units and clauses, more nonrestrictive modifiers, and fewer errors" (195). What is interesting is their summary and then complication of M. A. K. Halliday's and Ruqauya Hansan's work with textual cohesion, which they separate into two types: endophoric, the semantic ties within a text that relate one part to another; and exophoric, the elements that lie outside a text (189–90). Witte's and Faigley's work showed that high-rated essays had more "collocations," or elaborations and examples than the lower-rated ones (198). But in the end they are careful not to recommend the direct teaching of elaboration because so many issues related to "cohesion" are related to factors outside the text, including what factors relevant to the *reader* affect the "cohesion" of the text (199–202). In other words, textual features alone cannot determine whether a text is coherent or cohesive. Its clarity depends also on who is reading it, when, where, and why.

Harping on "grammar" gives the message that "writing" *is* grammar, which can be and often is easily binarized into a what-is-right discussion, the above complications notwithstanding—and usually not discussed. How can we deal with revising and editing so that students both understand the importance of well-edited prose as well as the complex, inexact, socially constructed process that results in what gets defined as "well-edited" prose? How can we help writers (and readers) see that "standard" English is, as Keith Gilyard points out, "standardized" English?³

Using Multiple Channels

In spite of all the caveats we must juggle as we help students revise and edit their work, there are some multiple-channel strategies that can help students rethink an argument, revisit a claim, or reconceptualize

an entire project. Here is one that uses the physical re-positioning of paragraphs as a tool for rethinking the whole text, as well as for revising parts of it.

As do the index-cards-manipulation exercise described in Chapter 3, cutting and pasting paragraphs challenges students to reconceptualize organizational patterns in an essay or paper. It also helps them see results of paragraphing decisions and choices regarding transitional sentences or words. For this exercise, I am indebted to Anna McMullen, an instructor at Utica College of Syracuse University, whose class I observed actively engaged in this activity.

Cutting and Pasting Paragraphs

First, students come to class with typed copies of their drafts, as well as scissors and tape. Writers remove any staples from their drafts, as well as top margins, page numbers, or anything else that might indicate original paragraph order. They then cut the paper apart by paragraph, and shuffle the order, and leave them in a neat pile on their desks. Then they switch seats with a neighbor. Now each student must put someone else's paragraphs in some kind of logical order, based on content and possible argumentative purpose, taping their selections together. When that's completed, students change seats again, with the new reader looking at the now taped-together essay. This new reader may agree with and initial the taped version, or decide on yet another paragraph order, indicating the new order by numbering his or her choice.

Then writers return to their original seats and see what others have done to the order of their paragraphs. After students have a chance to study the results, they can write about it, draw, or discuss with the class what it might mean if the new paragraph orders are identical or similar to, or radically different from, their original. Any result, of course, could indicate desirable or undesirable features of the writer's original text, but the benefits of the task for both writers and re-organizers comes in the active analysis of real text, in physically manipulating paragraphs and seeing the resulting change in emphasis.

Not only does this kinesthetic work with ideas help all learners experiment with organizational patterns, it also clearly exemplifies the role of transitions and the effects of unusually long or short paragraphs and/or sentences. Writers returning to their own work can see how someone else reconceived their argument, and writers also return better able to view their own work through a reader's lens, better able to predict a reader's misunderstandings.

This exercise is multisensory in a way that word-processed cutting and pasting is not. Moving paragraphs around on a computer screen has been with us for decades. However, moving the paper paragraphs

around like puzzle pieces demonstrates each change even as it allows writers to get a sense of how the entire essay changes when one paragraph is moved. It also has students getting up and moving to different desks. Writers obtain both metacognitive and physical distance on their work, and then return to it with a number of different perspectives.

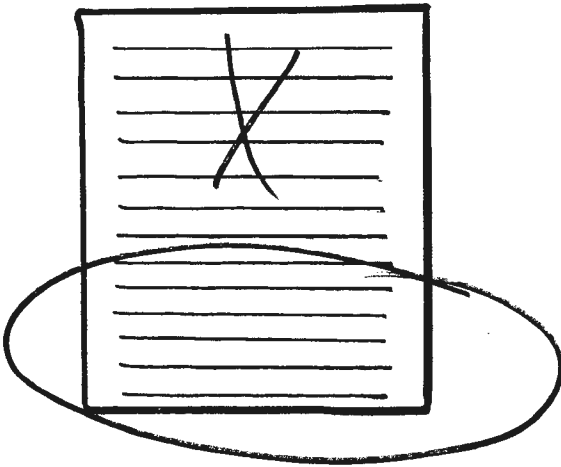
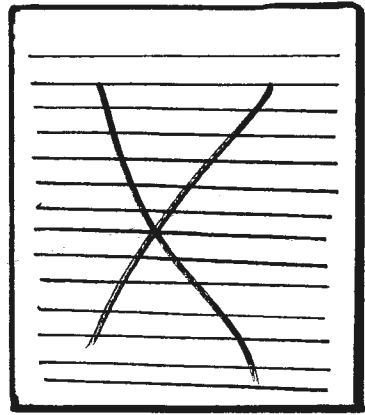
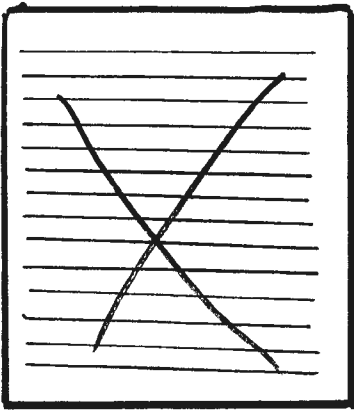
Sketching and Crossing out Sections of Typical Drafts

Crossing out sections of typical drafts is another way to help writers better conceive of their entire draft as a piece of clay they can manipulate as a whole (rather than just in atoms of word choice and spelling). The following demonstration stemmed from frustrating (and failed) attempts to get students to do more than run a spell checker when revising early drafts. From years of directing a writing center and reading many early drafts, I knew that for some writers, an early “draft” was really no more than what resulted from a fifteen-minute directed free-write. Nevertheless, it might be several pages long, and busy students were loathe to add to or change their texts in any substantive way. Deleting or starting over was out of the question.

Freewrites often have kernels of intriguing ideas, as Elbow has shown, but more often than not, the writer arrives at those ideas near the end of the writing session that produced the “draft.” More often than not, the last paragraph or so of a three-page draft revealed insights arrived at *after* the writer had produced a few pages of thinking on paper, focusing on the topic, playing with ideas. Sometimes, if writers begin the next draft with the last paragraph of their first draft, it pushes them in a direction in which the first draft helped them discover they wanted to go. However, if they cling to the first few pages, which may represent a meandering series of false starts (“throat-clearing,” someone has called it), their “revised draft” may be nothing more than well-edited chaos. The first pages may have served their purpose in the early draft of helping the writer focus, but once the writer has discovered that focus, the early meandering can be removed like training wheels from a bicycle. It slows down the rider/writer to keep support that’s no longer needed.

To illustrate this concept, I sketch on the board or overhead what this kind of early draft looks like (see Figure 4–1). I use lines to represent text. Then I circle the last paragraph or so, advising writers to examine it closely for the “center of gravity” Elbow says first drafts can reveal. I also dramatically cross out the first two pages, explaining that deleting large sections of text might be the most helpful approach to beginning a new draft. A graduate school professor (Gene Mirabelli, at SUNY Albany) once said in a creative writing workshop that one way to emphasize a point was to eliminate the distracters. This invaluable ad-

Figure 4-1
Circling and crossing out sections of typical drafts



vice, given to fiction writers, applies to academic writers as well. The first draft reveals things. Then it should be sifted for its plumpest kernels and the rest discarded.

Something about sketching these hypothetical drafts on the board and then crossing out huge sections of them dramatizes for students the

value of deep, radical revision in a much more powerful way than simply telling them to make more than surface-level changes. Not every last paragraph is a gem, of course, and not every early portion of a first draft should be thrown out. I draw alternate versions of hypothetical drafts on the board, circling different sections and crossing out different paragraphs. The point is to show how a first draft can be revised, not sentence by sentence or word by word, but totally reconceived in subsequent drafts that are more focused and more powerful not only for what's been added, but also what's been deleted. This sketched demonstration can be done graphically, as shown in Figure 4-1, on a black or white board, a flip chart, or an overhead. A three-dimensional version of it might use Legos, Tinkertoys, modeling clay, multi-colored pipe cleaners, or people.

The Hunt for "Padding"

Another way to get writers thinking about major revisions, especially deletions, is to ask them to locate "padding"—chunks of text variously called "tangents," "Engfish" (Ken Macrorie's term for the overinflated chunks common in the writing of English majors), or by a less euphemistic, barnyard-related metaphor. Padding can be unnecessarily repeated ideas, unrelated experience, inflated language, irrelevant information, or any sentence or paragraph that detracts from, rather than adds to, what seems to be a writer's overall purpose. Padding is common in school writing because it can stretch a paper that might not fit minimum word or page length requirements. Experienced and inexperienced writers are equally familiar with this material. They've all written it, and they all know it when they see it. Teachers read it because they have to. It bores everyone.

Writers may resist parting with sections of their own texts, but they are less hesitant to assist in chopping out padded sections of classmates' drafts. Here are questions that can direct peer responders to help writers locate unneeded sentences or paragraphs:

- Can you point to any sections of this draft that might have been added as padding to stretch the paper.
- What sections are unnecessary, repetitive, or irrelevant?
- What could be crossed out without harming the overall draft?
- What sections, if gone, might even help clarify the overall purpose of the draft?

Once students understand what it is they're looking for, they can easily spot it. In fact, whenever I ask students to help their classmates seek out and destroy padding, there are many knowing nods and grins.

Once they've irradiated it in a classmate's paper, they return to their own drafts more open to finding and eliminating it in their own.

Thinking in these ways is analogous to viewing a painting or listening to music from different perspectives: studying the foreground and then the background, and then both together. How do the details contribute to the overall effect? How does the overall effect change when the viewer shifts position in relation to the painting, or the listener plays with treble and bass adjustments? Students might look at early sketches of paintings or different cuts of famous songs to see how artists change and revise their work.

Padding with a Purpose

Another way to help students think about reorganizing their essays in substantial ways is to follow the "padding" hunt described above with a discussion that contradicts it. In other words, sometimes "padding" has a purpose. Sometimes text that appears in relation to the bulk of the draft to be "padding" may actually reveal the direction in which the writer really wants to go. Drawing on Jane Gallup's interpretation of a photography-related term and metaphor used by Roland Barthes, Julie Jung explains that in photography, the "stadium" is the main idea within the picture, but that it is the more interesting "punctum," the "unexpected detail" or "disruption" that invites an audience to look beyond the frame, that "offer[s] proof that revision is possible." Jung argues that we should "highlight the disruption rather than gloss over it, or worse yet, explain it away" (438–39). Similarly, the hunt for padding, informed by a discussion of "punctum," can help writers consider exploring further the intriguing slips, the rich code, they might have previously deleted as tangents.

Writers and readers alike need to be alert for these hints or traces of meaning, which is impossible if they've got their noses to the paper combing for comma and spelling errors. They'll miss the potentially big picture and re-organizing potential that an apparently "irrelevant" paragraph or sentence can provide. Readers can learn how to be attuned to these revelatory tangents in early drafts: the road not taken, but should have been. The point is to get people thinking differently about their own "tangents" and how they might not be extraneous after all, but road signs or pointers. Unless *readers* approach drafts globally, however, the text will not yield these invaluable clues. Copy editors do not discover them. People who have had the "five-paragraph theme" too entrenched in their minds as a template for reading or writing drafts—and this can be English teachers as well as the conventionally "good writers" in the class—are sometimes the people least able to

help writers re-interpret drafts, with their sometimes purposeful tangents, as blueprints for major re-organization. People who typically do well with school writing can greatly benefit sometimes from people not as steeped in conventional organizational patterns. Students with social, kinesthetic, or mathematical talents might be more likely to recognize “departures” from the theme as arrows to the writer’s subliminal purpose, even when the writer herself might not recognize them.

Getting writers to reconceptualize and reorganize drafts, as writing teachers well know, is a Herculean task. Radical reorganization is also sometimes the only chance a draft has of being substantially improved. *Telling* students to make global changes is useless. *Showing* them how to do so by using unconventional and multisensory strategies is a more dramatic and productive use of time. Designing peer response strategies that take advantage of the insights and perspectives of all learners, not just those with linguistic talents, challenges everyone to make radical, global revisions.

Listening to Drafts

Listening to a draft (rather than reading it with red pen in hand) is much more conducive to hearing these departures from a “main” idea, both tangential departures as well as the important revelatory kind. Many Composition scholars have long promoted the efficacy of reading aloud in detecting overall purpose and tone (see Moffett, Ponsot and Deen, Berthoff, and others). Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) have also argued that the drafting process should attend to “first things first,” which means that although the writing process is not linear, it makes sense to engage writers in the kind of “dialectical *process*” that will engage their imagination and help them discover their meaning (Berthoff’s emphasis, 1981, 39–40). While holistic composing and reading strategies are not new to Composition classes, the silent reading of written drafts by “peer editors” too often ignores the multisensory advantages of oral reading and concentrated listening. When students listen to each other’s drafts, several things happen. The listeners hone their listening concentration and practice analyzing both the overall purpose and structure of the text and then articulating their reactions to it. The writers get to hear their work out loud, which by itself can tell them which sentences sound choppy, which ones are never-ending, which ones are confusing, causing readers to trip. They also get perspectives from students who might be alert close editors, as well as from students who might be overall analysts, able to provide insightful, forest-like overviews not possible if readers are inspecting trees or examining leaves.

Effective writing center pedagogy has long taken advantage of the fact that if inexperienced tutors silently read a written draft, they al-

most invariably begin to address editorial issues of correctness before a writer has had a chance to let overall meaning fully crystallize. In contrast, hearing a piece read out loud by the writer helps tutors or peer readers listen for important issues such as overall purpose, voice, organization, thesis, evidence, examples, and so on. If one of those global issues is inchoate or even completely out of whack, the writer needs to find out now, when global changes are more palatable, not after he or she has carefully edited for run-ons, verb-tense agreement, spelling, and the like. Many writing center directors wisely train peer tutors to have writers read their work out loud, allowing the tutor to do some alert listening. In fact, if writers seem particularly frustrated, sometimes it's best to put the draft aside for a while. The reader/tutor can interview the writer, with an open-ended question such as, "What is the purpose of this project?" This should get the writer talking, and therefore thinking. Having sketch pads, Legos, sticky notes, or other materials available might be helpful to students at this point. This technique of *listening* to ideas or drafts, a common and successful approach in writing centers, works well as a classroom strategy also. It can be used for generating or organizing ideas, as discussed in Chapter 3, or later for paragraph- or sentence-level responses.

Metaphors

Metaphors work like multisensory strategies because, as discussed in Chapter 3, they force unlike things together, shifting perspective or blending images (the child's laugh was a wind chime). I discovered their power several years ago when I was teaching a Women in World Literature course to upper-level English majors. I was frustrated with their first drafts of analytical papers because all they were doing was summarizing what this or that critic had said about the writer or text they were studying. These were people I knew had insightful, somewhat original things to say, yet they clung to dead critics like life preservers, fronting decades-old ideas instead of their own. The students' analyses became a weak "me-too" listing of critics' views, instead of the critics' views providing a quick, legitimizing ethos to the students as members of a discourse community with authority to speak about these texts. I had tried *telling* them to foreground their own ideas and to soft-pedal the critics. "Use more of your own ideas," I said. That did nothing.

I needed to help writers see their drafts in a different way, to disrupt their business-as-usual approach to churning out a paper and revising a draft by tending to cosmetic niceties. My driver education experience kicked in again as I suddenly came up with this metaphor: "You do the driving for this paper," I said, and I drew a car on the board. "You are in the driver's seat. You plan the route. Put the critics in the

back seat. Don't even let them look at the map." In fact, I said, "You may want to put them in the trunk." (Now I had their attention.) "If you get hopelessly lost," I continued, "you may want to stop the car, open the trunk, and allow them to say a word or two, but this is your trip." At this point, they were all laughing, and they knew what I was talking about. I had been putting my list of dos and don'ts on the board, and at this point, someone asked, "Can we add to the list?" Class members added the second half of this extended metaphor:

You are in the driver's seat of this critical paper.

You do the driving.

You plan the route.

You hold the map.

Put the critics in the back seat.

Don't even let them look at the map.

Put them in the trunk if they won't keep quiet.

Pop the trunk and ask their opinion only when you need it.

Don't drive around the same block twice.

Signal all turns.

Be careful of detours.

Don't run out of gas before the end of the trip.

One student from that class e-mailed me long after she graduated. She said she had a vivid memory of that day we did the driver's seat metaphor in class and that it had helped her through many subsequent writing projects.

I've also used metaphors with students to help them conceptualize why proofreading tasks are important. I tell them that a brand-new house might be designed very well, have a solid foundation and plenty of closet space and insulation. But these might not be immediately obvious to a buyer who enters the house for a final walk-through before the closing. If there are cigarette butts in the kitchen sink, fast-food wrappers on the counter, or wallpaper scraps on the floor, the potential owner might be distracted from noticing the cathedral ceilings or stylish chandeliers. So by itself, I say, one empty paint can left in the garage is not important. But three or four can make a buyer reconsider the entire sale, thinking perhaps that the sloppy things she *can* see are indicative of the state of things she can't see, such as beams, pipes, insulation, and electrical wires. So before you open the house to potential buyers, I say, pull up the drop cloths, throw away the cigarette butts, wash the windows, and shine the faucets and sinks. A vacuumed car-

pet doesn't make a house more solid, but one covered with sawdust and paint chips can draw attention away from things you want someone to really appreciate.

A Word About Assessment

Before, during, or after students respond to each others' drafts regarding matters of editing and revising, they should discuss and/or help determine or negotiate how their writing will be judged in the context of the particular assignment. How much does surface correctness "count"? What about level of risk taken by the writer? What about the project's relevance to world issues? Is responding to others' drafts part of the evaluation? Many Composition teacher/scholars have addressed issues of assessment (Peter Elbow, Brian Huot, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Bob Broad, etc.). Peter Elbow has suggested putting as many evaluative factors as are consciously available on the table for discussion and clarity (1993). Lee Odell has students look at high-, middle-, and lowrated past essays of the type they are now being asked to produce.⁴ My purpose here is not to summarize every major theory regarding assessment. The point is, students should be privy to research and disagreements regarding assessment and what it suggests about the way some writing has been judged. Even for undergraduates, a brief foray into well-known Composition research about grading might help them develop a more conscious awareness of what factors in the past have impacted different judges' perception of text quality. Complicating notions of how writing gets evaluated provides a different perspective to students who may believe there is such a thing as an ideal text, as well as an ideal way to respond to one.

To help students become more conscious of what they value as readers, and why, students might read or be told about the research Paul Diederich and his colleagues did in 1961, as described in his 1974 text, *Measuring Growth in English*. This elegant piece of older research should help students abandon myths of ideal texts or ideal judgments about them, which in turn can help them take more seriously their writing and their peer responding.

Without the customary norming sessions the Educational Testing Service oversees before a "real" evaluation of student writing, this experiment had 53 people from a variety of disciplines and careers rank 300 student papers. They were instructed to read them at home and to put them in 9 piles "in order of general merit." There were to be at least 12 papers in each of the piles (5). The results were riotously scattered: "out of the 300 essays graded, 101 received every grade from 1 to

9; 94 percent received either seven, eight, or nine different grades; and no essay received less than five different grades from these fifty-three readers" (6).

After analyzing the written comments of the judges, the researchers found some patterns. First, "the largest cluster" of readers ranked the papers primarily for their "ideas expressed: their richness, soundness, clarity, development, and relevance to the topic and the writer's purpose" (6). As responders to their peers' writing, students need to know this lest they set about concentrating solely on copy editing issues in the draft. Next in matter of importance to the judges, especially to those who were college English instructors, was what I have been calling surface correctness: "errors in usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling" (7). The third-highest factor was something the researchers called "organization and analysis" (7-8), though it seems to me that those categories might overlap with the "development" and "richness" aspects included in the first category. The fourth aspect valued by readers was related to wording, phrasing, and vocabulary (8). The fifth-highest comments, and ones which came primarily from those readers Diederich characterized as creative writers, "emphasized style, individuality, originality, interest, and sincerity—the *personal qualities* revealed by the writing, which we decided to call 'flavor,' although they themselves called it 'style'" (8).

After conducting this analysis, the researchers concluded that even these five factors they were able to discern among the different readers accounted for only part of the difference in grading. They pointed out that the same readers might grade differently if given the papers at a different time and place (10). If this experiment doesn't confuse things enough, there is Benjamin Rosner's work, cited by Diederich, in which one set of essays stamped "honors" was evaluated by one group of teachers; the same set was stamped "regular" and graded by another set. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, "the papers that were stamped 'honors' averaged almost one grade-point higher than the other copies of the very same papers that were stamped 'regular'" (12). Commenting on why this happened, Diederich says, "we find what we expect to find" (12).

Diederich's fifth factor regarding "good" writing's display of "sincerity" and "individuality" supports William E. Coles, Jr.'s and James Vopat's research, cited by Lester Faigley in *Fragments of Rationality* (120-26). A majority of the forty-eight writing teachers, researchers, and theorists Coles and Vopat asked to participate in their research on assessment consistently valued "personal experience" essays that they described as "authentic," "honest," or "truthful." Faigley sees this as evidence that Composition is overly focused on the concept of an individual self, as opposed to being more critically aware of what he sees as

a more sophisticated, post-modern view of the multiplicity of constructed selves. However, the Coles/Vopat research Faigley cites here is useful because it puts on the table what specific influential English professors value in a text. This knowledge can help students step away from the table, get an overview of these values, and then judge the judgments. They can then make more informed decisions about what they will include or delete from their own texts, and why.

These older but fascinating experiments would open discussions about the relationships between and among readers, writers, and texts. As Diederich points out, “few if any readers are conscious of what they are actually responding to in student writing that makes them grade one paper higher than another” (8–9). Discussing these or similar experiments, or participating in informal ones like these, might help peer and teacher responders become more conscious of the textual features that affect them, as well as the socially constructed reasons why. Having even a passing familiarity with research that shows the inexact science involved in “grading a paper” may help students become more alert responders, as well as more sophisticated contributors to future school board and community debates about “standards” and “writing quality.”

There are an almost infinite supply of studies and practices that could muddy the waters around notions of “good” and “bad” writing, which in turn complicate strategies, multisensory or otherwise, used to teach writing. These complications range from the deeply held prejudices about people such as the kind Victor Villanueva describes, to the perhaps unconscious valuing of the perceived “authenticity” or “originality” of a text commented on by Lester Faigley, to the simpler, but just as culturally complicated notions of the infamous “comma splice”—i.e., what it is and isn’t and who can and cannot use it. As Knoblauch and Brannon point out, “Competent writers regularly violate technical rules, the comma splice included, while unpracticed writers often manage to avoid technical lapses without thereby much enhancing the quality of their texts” (1984, 153). Lester Faigley notes that comma splices can be found across a spectrum of respected publications today, and that this practice “may reflect a relaxing of formal conventions that has been underway throughout this [20th] century” (203 in *Fragments of Rationality*). Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee acknowledge most composition graders’ rabid hatred of sentence fragments. However, they call the conventional “fragment” definition “nonsense [that] derives from an eighteenth-century superstition about sentences, which supposed that every sentence represents a complete thought. Whatever that is” (284).

Why then, do people in authority pay so much attention to “fragments,” “comma splices,” and other linguistic sins that some writers are

allowed to commit and others are not? One reason of course is Sharon Crowley's point that these things provide a handy tool for discrimination when needed. A less sinister, but still not admirable, reason is posited by Donald Daiker, who argues that it is much easier for reader-judges to tell writers what they are doing "wrong" than it is to take the time to analyze and articulate their strengths (1989, 110–11).

Issues of revising and editing are important not because they concern "correctness," but because they concern socially constructed *perceptions* of correctness which we and our students ignore at our peril. These commonplaces about "correct" English are infused with so many elements that it's tempting not to deal with editing at all. On the other hand, it's possible to focus entirely on revising and editing. That's because discussing notions of "correctness" by following all the complex paths Crowley, Villanueva, Williams, Diederich, and others have shown us, can raise issues related to every other aspect of "writing": audience, purpose, context, voice, evaluation, assignment, neatness, etc. Even the dismissal or taken-for-grantedness of "well-edited prose" could be the subject of an upper-level graduate course on the theoretical assumptions informing that phrase.

Sharon Crowley points out that the curriculum for Freshman English is thought of as "cultural capital—as the mutual property of all persons who conceive of education as a site for transmission of received dominant culture" (1998, 231). No wonder, she says, that it engenders such heated debates. She goes on to explain how "correctness" functions as a gatekeeper:

In America's cultural imagination, mastery of "correct" English still signifies that its users are suitable for admission to the class of educated persons. This is generally wielded negatively; that is, "correct" English is used as a handy standard of exclusion by those who practice racial or class discrimination. (231)

Confusion as Conduit

What all this means is that we may leave students confused about issues of revising, editing, "grammar," and "correctness." This is a good thing. Confusion is a conduit for productive sparks, the friction needed to keep us and our students rethinking writing and its reception in our society. As Paulo Freire understood, certainty about theory and practice stifles praxis because praxis involves a continuous dialectic about what and how to teach. In *Rhetorical Traditions*, Knoblauch and Brannon rightly warn against an uninformed mixing of teaching theories

that contradict each other and epistemological assumptions that may confuse students.

However, as the foregoing discussion of revising and editing issues has shown, there are contradictions students need to negotiate for themselves. People *are* judged by their language use, *and* they are also judged by other things that sometimes parade as issues of language. A reader's perception of a writer's "errors" can deeply affect that writer's ethos, yet what a reader perceives as error varies with the perceived authority of both writer and reader. Writers and peer readers need to pay attention to the ideas in a draft, but they also have to pay homage to situational constraints as they go from one rhetorical situation to the next.

What this might mean in practice is that we need to talk about specific ways to remember the details of perceived correctness, even as we talk about why those perceptions can vary so much. One example is a conversation I used to have more in the 1980s than I do today. It concerned the use of gendered pronoun use. At writing center staff meetings, we talked about ways to both answer writers' questions about whether to use "he," "she," "they," or "he/she," and also to understand the possible effect that choice can have on intended readers. In other words, students need to know the ever-changing rules of a variety of games, even as they learn to question the game.

To return to the closet/clothing metaphor: After we have examined all the items and thrown some away, there may be things we cannot use, but cannot yet discard. Even the cheap fads of long ago may be rediscovered by a new generation (i.e., the return of polyester, kerchiefs, pant suits, and bell bottoms).

Copying sentences is one example of an oddity that might "work" in ways we don't yet understand. In their rhetoric textbook, Crowley and Hawhee remind us that ancient rhetoricians often had their students read aloud to develop both reading skills as well as a way to listen for rhythm and style. Or they would have their students copy favorite passages word-for-word into a commonplace book, the act of copying aiding memory and copiousness, and the slow motion of the hand copying helping writers "focus on the passage being copied" (293–94).

As old as this practice is, it is consistent with Arthur S. Reber's 1967 research, cited by Patrick Hartwell, that "demonstrated that mere exposure to grammatical sentences produced tacit learning: subjects who copied several grammatical sentences performed far above chance in judging the grammaticality of other letter strings" (1985, 117; Reber research is footnote 17). These results are also consistent with writers' stories of themselves as avid readers since early childhood. Those who

read a lot may internalize grammatical structures in ways that cannot “be taught” directly. Yet not everyone loves to read, and they are our students, too—smart in ways we who think in words may not be capable of fully understanding.

I think we are stuck with this contradiction: that we must help students negotiate the shoals of “correctness” even as we try to expose how those sandbars can shift with time and tide, and how some people get to sail over them in yachts while others run aground in heavy fishing vessels. That we may have to use a combination of approaches—even opposite, epistemologically conflicting approaches—to help students negotiate this danger, does not spring from an easy eclecticism. Rather, it comes from strategic, difficult maneuvering in fairly dirty water, not unlike the task of effective rhetors.

We can use the revising/editing/grammar/correctness debate as a point of departure for the more complete debate that needs to take place in our classrooms, in our department meetings, in our College Councils, and in our local and national newspapers. We may be weary of the fight. But if we who have the most background in the complexities of this issue refuse to engage those who don’t, we have only ourselves to blame for the prevalence of simplistic declarations about “correctness,” “grammar,” and “proper English” that we may have had shoved in the “case closed” file in the back of the closet for decades. As Fox points out, we need to hold “intelligent and respectful conversations about composition with people who are uninformed” (113). How to do this effectively is the subject of Chapter 6.

Editing and revising is a drama about power. It has simple or elaborate costumes, depending on the play, and its success depends on its debut city and sophistication level of its audience. Instead of simply being given a list of which lights to dim or which curtains to draw, students should take a backstage tour of the whole production, as well as a peek at the financial backers. Since the entire production involves reading as well as writing, the next chapter suggests ways to use multiple literacies to analyze texts.

Notes

1. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, p. 283.
2. For an examination of the grammar controversy from a Vygotskian perspective, see Chapter 14 of James Thomas Zebroski’s *Thinking Through Theory*.
3. “Identities and the ‘Dream’: Dilemmas for Composition at the Turn of the Century” (Chair’s Address), CCCC 2000, April 13, 2000, Minneapolis.
4. In the late 1980s, at Maria College in Albany, New York, I attended a very useful workshop Lee Odell led on this strategy.