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I teach Advanced Composition as a writing workshop in which each student has all his papers read by every other student in the class, receives written and verbal responses from the members of his discussion group, and writes a reaction to the whole experience of writing the paper, hearing it discussed, and reading the written responses. The entire package--paper, group members' responses, and author's reaction--then comes to me for my comment. Since the method is confusing and intimidating when first encountered, I employ a "trial" in-class writing device at the first class meeting by which students reveal to each other how apprehensive and how mutually respectful they are and hope to be. The purpose of this method is to foster an atmosphere in which students feel a desire to do good, serious work to which they are personally committed.

Students must invent their own topics. There is never a required subject matter, length, or rhetorical form for any of the seven out-of-class papers. I use a very few readings (autobiographical essays), mostly at the term's beginning, to stimulate the first topics and suggest/review the way an experience generates a topic and a topic reveals its thesis. After the first papers, stimulation for topics, where needed, comes frequently from the subjects or approaches of other students' papers and/or from individual conference with me. Topics deal mostly with experiences of personal importance and complexity to the author; they range from an individual's encounters with death, violence, important personal relationships, to his struggles with literary texts, to his analyses of government policy, of sociological phenomena, of psychic and religious experience.

The responses are a vital part of the student's writing for the course. A response is not (is forbidden to be) a critique or criticism of a paper; it must be not an "objective" evaluation, but a subjective, personal report. Its purpose is two-fold: 1) to convey to the author what seven or eight different individuals in his audience experienced in

reading his paper, i.e., to give him a sense of audience; and 2) to help the response-writer learn to read well, to understand and articulate his own reading experience. By the second half of the course, some of the responses a student writes each time are drafts of papers in themselves. I comment regularly on the responses where needed as well as on the papers, and we frequently discuss response-writing in class.

The author's written reaction following the discussion of his paper, in the words of one student's course evaluation, "allowed me to 'mouth off' and express my gripes about the responses without hurting anybody's feelings." It serves another purpose as well; for in the process of explaining what the idea was he was really trying to develop, a student often finds that he has rewritten the troublesome part of his essay.

By the time a paper reaches me, I am in the grader's ideal position, having eight or so commentators, including the author, against whom to weigh the response I formed on first reading. Besides providing help with mechanics and assigning a grade to each effort, I simply continue from my own perspective the discussion begun by the author's reaction. Our discussion is furthered also by two required half-hour individual conferences, one after the second paper to make sure the student is discovering the kinds of things he wants to write about, and one before the penultimate out-of-class paper. I cancel three hours of class time for each of these rounds of conferences.

As is perhaps evident, a strongly held philosophy of language use underlies this course structure (and all those hours at the ditto machine). Epistemological underpinnings may be located in the thought of the philosopher Michael Polanyi (e.g., Meaning, Chicago, 1975). I also draw upon a "rhetoric" (which, however, I find unusable as a text) by James E. Miller, Jr., The Rhetoric of Imagination. The method itself was worked out by Professor Leonard Hegland of Washington State University.

A result of this philosophical orientation is that I do not hold generalized discussions about matters of rhetoric or style. On the Polanyian principle that no tools, or set of symbols (like a set of muscles) can be used effectively if used with "focal awareness" (see Meaning, Ch. 2), I usually restrict discussion of writing techniques to dealing with particular student texts in response to writing situations that come up. I do have one three-hour session on writing physical description and one on analyzing a literary text; but for both I use writing from the current class as well as some published writing, and keep the focus of our analysis on the qualities of experience, of mind, of sensorium, which were engaged in the skillful act of writing.