

The Teaching of E 011

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In 1975 the University of Delaware, like other schools throughout the country, became worried enough about the literacy (or the lack of it) of its students to decide to do away with the exemption policy for E110 (Critical Reading and Writing) and to put into effect a three-track Freshman English program. Students who would have previously been exempted from E110 on the basis of SAT verbal scores of 580 or above are now put into Honors E110 sections; students whose SAT scores fall between 580 and 350 are placed in the regular E110 course; and the remaining students, below 350, are expected to take a special Pre-E110 course, designed to bring their skills up to Freshman English level. The SAT scores are not the sole criterion for placement; a timed diagnostic essay and a grammar test are also administered to incoming students, and the final course and class assignments are made on the basis of all three.

The University Writing Center has the responsibility of teaching all the students in the Pre-E110 group. The course (now called E 011--English Essentials) which the Center has developed to prepare these students for entrance to E110 requires formal registration; it carries three credits and is graded on a Pass/Fail basis. The E 011 classes consist of no more than four students, who meet three hours a week with a member of the Writing Center staff. The intention of E 011 is not to duplicate E110 but rather to provide students who have had limited writing experience with basic skills.

Students are not permitted to take E110 until they have passed E 011. The following general criteria suggest the degree of facility that may be practically hoped for in the E 011 student after a semester of work at the Writing Center.

Category of Composition

	<u>Sensitivity</u>	<u>Degree of Facility</u> <u>Competency</u>
1. <u>Word</u>		
Spelling	X	
Capitalization		
Word Choice	X	X

2.	<u>Phrase</u>		
	Diction	X	
	Prepositions	X	
3.	<u>Clause</u>		
	Sentence fragments		X
	Indep. and Dep. clauses (recognition and use)		X
	Agreement		X
	Tense		X
	Punctuation		
	Internal	X	
	End		X
4.	<u>Sentence</u>		
	Coherence of construction		X
	Variation in construction	X	

In addition, the Center attempts to develop sensitivity toward logical connections between sentences in sequence.

Since the actual teaching of composition is the task of the E110 instructor, the E 011 instructor concentrates primarily on the sentence. However, paragraphs and even essays are often required from E 011 students because of the difficulty of correcting problems in a vacuum. The Center feels that students can learn the concepts more readily if they see them misused in their own writing.

The students (142 of them in Fall 1976) that the Writing Center finds itself responsible for are a diverse group--male and female, black and white, in-state and out-of-state, majoring in everything from agriculture to zoology. The one thing they have in common is their lack of adequate skills in the mechanics of writing. Their diagnostic essays reveal severe problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and syntax. The following examples, taken unchanged from student essays, demonstrate some of these problems:

On the outhter hand a television can be easier to forget important ideas; simple because the watcher's mind may wounder.

There's one thing you can't stop that is Manifest Destiny so in order to stay on top and not become unemployed you must do as any doing, jumb on the bang wagon and run the computers.

In my opinion I would say that the way the University looks at it is that they feel as though students should have a board view of the whole University program to one extent or the other.

Television programs eleviate a lot of good and interesting points because of the time factor involved. However, books tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Therefore, television can act a part in a matter of seconds when in the book it might take ten to fifteen minutes.

Although the last example shows that some teacher somewhere had gotten across the idea of transitions between sentences, these students are clearly not equipped to write on the college level. The duty of the Writing Center is to

take them and teach them to recognize what goes into a good paragraph and to give them the necessary tools to be able to write one.

The groups of four or fewer students are taught by the Writing Center staff, which includes both part-time faculty and graduate students in English on teaching assistantships. The individual instructor determines the design of the course for each of his groups. Thus, although the goals for E 011 are the same for all the groups, the method of attaining them comprises a wide variety of approaches, depending on both the proclivities of the instructor and, thanks to the small size of the classes, the specific needs of the students.

These students have been exposed somewhere along the line to rules of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and syntax, but the rules haven't stuck. The problem the Writing Center instructors face is making them stick this time. A student who thinks "the" is a verb needs a new way of deciding what a verb is; a student who writes "Being worked to the bones from sun up to sun set without their normal diet a person couldn't possibly keep their right frame of mind" needs to be taught (among other things) the relationship between a noun and the pronoun used to refer to it. Therefore, after diagnosis of student problems, many of the instructors begin with the parts of speech but move away from traditional grammar to a structural approach.

While some instructors spend the first month on grammar and skill exercises, others have found it valuable to put the emphasis on a more practical application, having students write paragraphs immediately and attacking grammatical problems as they appear in the student samples. Some students can handle grammar and punctuation easily in exercises but are unable to apply the rules when they are asked to write something on their own. For these students, free composition on the paragraph level from the outset of instruction has proved the best method.

Maintaining student interest can be difficult in a course centering on grammar. However, the small-group format goes a long way toward alleviating this problem; in addition, a number of the staff employ individual conferences as an integral part of their method. The emphasis on using both the students' own work and material developed by the instructors to illustrate and correct errors further tempers the curse of a totally grammatical approach.

Most instructors try to give their students some idea of what E110 is going to ask of them. Toward the end of the semester, they introduce the rhetorical types--process, description, analysis, definition, persuasion, comparison/contrast, cause/effect--taught in E110, discuss the form of the essay, and mention research papers and the use of the library.

Like the determination of method, the choice of textbooks is left up to the instructor. The Writing Center has a wide selection of books, and instructors can pick a text suited to the ability of their students. The students then purchase the required book at the University Bookstore. Those instructors whose students lack even the basic elements of grammar generally use only grammar texts, supplemented by original exercises and the students' own writing. Those instructors whose students already have some grasp of grammatical principles feel that exposure to good writing is a necessary adjunct to the teaching of writing. Therefore, they include reading selections--essays, short stories, and poems, generally chosen from E110 texts--as part of the course material; these selections provide subject matter for student paragraphs and essays. Most instructors require students with spelling problems to work on their own through a programmed spelling book, available for use at the Center; tests for each chapter check on the students' progress.

Several of the instructors are sending students for one hour a week to the PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) project, which uses computer terminals in Willard Hall. Students work there with the computer on programmed grammatical and punctuation exercises which give immediate feedback; reports on their progress are retrievable by the instructor. Some instructors are now in the process of preparing their own exercises to be programmed into the computer.

Although each instructor's approach is individual, the goals for successful completion of the course remain essentially the same, and students have a clear idea of what they are expected to accomplish. Syllabuses are issued to each group, usually during the first week of class; these list the required texts and the reading, writing, and exercise assignments for the semester. Additional hand-outs, prepared by the instructor, contain exercises to be completed either in class or at home or provide detailed discussions of points the instructor wishes particularly to emphasize. All instructors give a final examination, which includes both free composition and skill exercises.

The advantages of this system of instruction are obvious. The impersonal atmosphere of the University often intimidates freshmen, who are used to high school classes where they know and are known by their teachers and their classmates; the informal atmosphere of the Writing Center rapidly puts them at ease and alleviates the hostility or anger some of them feel at being classified as "dumb." The smallness of the groups encourages rapport between student and instructor; most of the students call their instructor by his first name and feel comfortable asking questions in class or seeing the instructor outside of class time for additional help. The individual recognition each student receives, both from the instructor and from fellow class members, helps motivate him to do assignments as well as possible. In addition, the small-group format allows the instructor not only to tailor teaching to the students' specific problems but also to provide immediate feedback; mistakes have no time to become engrained but are corrected on the spot or, at the least, by the next class period. A final advantage is the relative lack of pressure for grades; E 011 is a Pass/Fail course.

Selected Texts Used in E 011

Spelling

Smith, Genevieve Love. Spelling by Principles: A Programmed Text. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1966.

Programmed spelling book. Includes diagnostic test to identify specific problems. Teacher's Manual contains tests for each chapter.

Punctuation

Hodges, John C., and Mary E. Whitten. Harbrace College Handbook. 7th ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, Inc., 1972. (Together with: Sheila Y. Graham, Harbrace College Workbook: Form 7 A.)

Contains a variety of material but is especially useful for punctuation. Workbook has exercises which may be handed out.

Many of the books listed under Grammar and Composition also contain useful sections on punctuation.

Grammar

Fawcett, Susan, and Alvin Sandberg. Grassroots: The Writer's Workbook. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

Glazier, Teresa Ferster. The Least You Should Know About English: Basic Writing Skills. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

Willis, Hulon. Grammar and Composition: Generating Sentences and Paragraphs. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

Willis, Hulon. Basic Usage, Vocabulary, and Composition. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

All contain useful discussions and exercises. First two are especially useful for low-level students. Third was used in many groups last year but was not particularly liked by many instructors; of slightly higher level than first two. Last is popular for more advanced E Oll students.

Composition

Langan, John. English Skills. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977.

Contains writing exercises which use good and bad student samples to show points. Has grammar and punctuation sections. Good arrangement of material.

LeFevre, Helen E., and Carl A. LeFevre. Writing by Patterns. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

A programmed workbook that uses pattern practice and sentence combining techniques.

Ostrom, John. Better Paragraphs. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968.

Has fully developed readings covering aspects of paragraph development but somewhat involved for student reading. Contains some good examples of paragraphs being focused and revised.

Sullivan, Kathleen E. Paragraph Practice: Text and Exercises in the Topic Sentence, the Paragraph, and the Short Composition. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1976.

Excellent basic approach to paragraph development--form and organization. Rich in examples and assignments.

Wiener, Harvey S. Creating Compositions. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977.