



WLA Newsletter

. . .writing as a liberating activity. . .

ISSUE NINE

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FINDLAY COLLEGE

USAGE AND ABUSAGE:

TEACHING GRAMMAR WITHOUT TEXTBOOKS (PART I)

Marie Jean Lederman
Baruch College
C.U.N.Y.

Like all teachers of writing, I have strong biases about the teaching of grammar. Bias number one: I teach grammar. Bias number two: I believe that the notion that students must somehow "learn grammar" before they begin writing is false; therefore, students in all my writing classes, remedial and non-remedial, write essays all term. Bias number three: I do not use grammar texts. Grammar texts are de-codable primarily by those who already know how to speak and write Standard English. They confuse "trick" questions on minor points of grammar with those real mistakes that our students do make, obliterating the line between what is very important in Standard Written English and what is less important. My main objection to grammar texts is that they utilize "canned writing"--similar to the use of "canned laughter" on television. I have the same objections to dead writing as I do to dead laughter. This leads to bias number four: I only use material written by students in that particular class to teach grammar. This writing is not "canned"; it is very much alive, having been written, generally, within the previous week or two.

I teach not only "grammar" but every aspect of writing from student writing. This makes my teaching of grammar an integral part of my teaching of writing. I make a conscious effort not to separate the teaching of grammar from the rest of what goes on in my writing classes, either by using special texts for it or by devoting special units during the term to it, or separate periods during the week. The teaching of grammar and the teaching of good writing are not separable activities, and using separate time periods and separate texts to "teach grammar" helps reinforce the notion, already firmly planted in our students' heads, that they are separable.

What I am describing is simply an alternative way of dealing with grammar in our students' writing--a way of teaching grammar without using grammar texts. Let me be specific. I am going to discuss the use of this method with one of my remedial writing classes at City University of New York.

WANTED:

SHORT ARTICLES FOR GRAMMAR FORUM

Issue Ten will continue WLA's focus on grammar in writing classes. "Usage and Abusage (Part II)" will examine benefits of teaching grammar without texts. And--if you want one--there will be a Readers' Forum on Grammar.

How do you respond to Lederman's approach? Are there specific ideas in the article that appeal to you or that appall you? Can you see ways that the approach could be adapted to fit your classes--or reasons why it could not? If you have a reaction and would like to be part of the Forum, send a response article under 500 words to Richard Gebhardt, English Department, Findlay College, Findlay, OH 45840.

My first assignment was an in-class essay on any topic. After I had read these papers at home, I sat down at my typewriter and picked out sentences which contained miscellaneous errors in Standard English. I made an effort to get sentences from each of my students' papers and to get at least one kind of each error which they, as a class, were making. I typed the sentences exactly as they appeared in the students' papers, except for spelling errors; I try not to reinforce incorrect spelling by copying misspelled words on these tear sheets.

When we met for the next class I returned the papers and distributed this sheet. I asked the students to take the sheet home and try to make corrections on any sentences which they thought were incorrect. If they couldn't see the error, of course they would leave the sentence alone. In addition to this assignment, I gave them their next writing assignment. We had read a New York Times article dealing with the sudden advent of three television shows which had heroes/heroines who were both ethnic and single. Their assignment was to watch one of these three programs and to write an essay discussing the reality or unreality of the program as each of them perceived it.

The next time we met we went over the first tear sheet containing sentences with errors from their first writing assignment. This allowed me to begin to get some idea of what kinds of errors my students were capable of picking up and correcting and what kinds of errors confused them. This gave me my direction for future teaching. I collected the essay on the reality or unreality of the television program. In addition to making comments on each paper, I decided to pick out two kinds of sentences for use in class: run-on sentences and sentences which contained subject-verb agreement errors.

Meanwhile, their next writing assignment was to compare and contrast two characters from two of these ethnic/single television programs. This assignment was given on a day when we talked about ways of setting up a comparison-contrast paper. When I read this set of essays I saw that some students were still confused about the use of the semicolon to divide run-on sentences. I duplicated a list of their sentences which contained this error. I also decided to use some of their paragraphs from this assignment to work with on topic sentences and paragraph development.

As the start of this one term suggests, I try to vary my procedures with these tear sheets. Students always take the sheets home first and so have time to make corrections. I spot-check in class to see who has made corrections and who hasn't. After we finish working with a sheet together, I sometimes ask a student to go up to the board and write a sentence of his or her own, unpunctuated or with whatever errors we've just been discussing. Then I ask another student to go up to the board and correct it.

For additional feedback, I sometimes duplicate representative sentences from our sheets and ask students to correct these in class. This serves as a kind of quiz. Although I don't give the students grades, I do, again, get some idea of who is noticing errors and who isn't. I don't grade the tear sheets because, ultimately, I'm not interested in whether or not students can make corrections on isolated pieces of paper. The real feedback comes from their essays. When a student who has been making a certain kind of error stops making that error, I have my feedback. If the student continues to make the error, I know that I need to work with the student individually in conference. After the conference, my assignment to the student is to go home and write a paragraph including some sentences which illustrate that the student has understood what we have just done.

Sometimes I divide the class into small groups of students who are making a particular kind of error; I assign a group leader who doesn't make this error and let him or her work with the group. I distribute appropriate tear sheets to each group, and make myself a resource person to each group. Again, the feedback is to have the students create sentences which are correct and which embody the rule that they have worked on during that period. Part II will appear in WLA, Issue Ten.

FOCUS: GRAMMAR AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

The approach of Marie Jean Lederman's "Teaching Grammar Without Textbooks" contrasts with the picture of grammar overkill in one city that Issue Eight contained. And Issue Ten will continue to focus on the place of grammar in writing classes. In the spirit of this special focus, Issue Nine contains a series of brief--and often conflicting--quotations intended to provoke thought about a subject of great importance.

From the Student Perspective*

WRITE ON THE WIND, EDIT LATER

Susie Foster
Ohio Wesleyan University

"Forty-eight per cent of the incoming freshmen at Ohio State University this fall could not write a satisfactory paragraph," reported a recent issue of the OSU student newspaper, 'The Lantern.'"

This was the paragraph that opened an article, "Educators Touchy on Pupil Writing Skills," in a December issue of the Mansfield News Journal. The theme of this article was developed around the "loss of language skills among American school children." These language skills were defined as "spelling, punctuation and captialization," in short, grammar, and led to the question "Are Mansfield City Schools following the national trend and letting writing skills fade?"

In search of the answer to this crucial question, the News Journal staffers interviewed several Mansfield educators. First, an attempt was made to compare IQ's of Mansfield students to those of Ohio students. "In overall ability (or IQ), Mansfield's 650 pupils who took the Ohio General Survey Test last September scored 8.3 points lower than the norm for the 29,500 Ohio pupils who took the test." From these scores, the News Journal staffers allowed themselves to draw the conclusion that there is a "loss of language skills."

Interviews with teachers led to an appallingly slanted conclusion that grammar is given little or no attention in the schools. "Jean McVicker, sixth grade teacher at Prospect school, explained why many grammar errors go uncorrected on pupils' papers. If the assignment is to copy something, then most teachers feel it must be done perfectly. But in creative assignments where the child must put down his own thoughts, we consider the overall effort. To point out minor errors would only be discouraging."

When the reader puts this News Journal article aside, he is left with the impression that the preservation of American education lies only in the hand of proper grammar. The reader blindly associates eloquence of phrase with perfection of "spelling, punctuation, and capitalization." The article failed to stress the need for creativity and expression of the self.

I am not advocating poor grammar. However, when writing a composition, one must have priorities. Good grammar is, of course, an important concern, but it should not be the first priority. Writing is an extremely draining and creative activity. Let us not burden this with ~~g~~binding grammar rules. For a grammatically-perfect composition that lacks creativity makes for sterile reading. Without creativity it lacks the verve that the human imagination offers.

It is in my own opinion that when writing, students first should put all formal rules out of their heads and simply take a subject and write down raw thoughts as creatively as possible. Then, later, they should edit for grammatical errors.

Let us not forget grammar, and the clarity and polish it brings to all compositions. But the editing should come in the final stages of the writing process. So, as a college student, my advice to all students is, write on the wind, edit later.

* Since writing instruction can only be evaluated in relationship to student response and performance, WLA from time to time prints comments on the writing teaching enterprise written by college and high school students. Do you have students with something to say about the teaching of writing? Ms. Foster is a college freshman.

WRITING CAN'T BE TAUGHT UNLESS GRAMMAR HAS BEEN LEARNED

. . . it is not really possible to teach composition (note that I did not say "learn to write") unless both teacher and student have a ready working knowledge of the syntactic resources of the language. (Francis Christensen, "The Course in Advanced Composition for Teachers," College Composition and Communication, May 1973, p. 167.)

FRESHMAN COMP:
AVAILABLE, USEFUL AND FUN

Sandra A. Engel
Mohawk Valley Community College

Since Freshman Composition is a composition course, its emphasis should be on writing. But, given my students and their expectations of themselves and their writing ability, I find I have two other objectives besides teaching them how to write. Students need to learn that writing is not to be dreaded, and that language is available and useful and fun. Six premises underlie these objectives.

(1) Students are better writers than they are given credit for being. Many students assure me they cannot write. They have histories of failure and even before class begins the self-fulfilling prophecy is on its way to fulfilling itself. And often their concept of English is that it is grammar, only grammar. I must persuade them otherwise. English is far more than grammar, and they can write.

(2) Because of this, students must be given an early sense of success in writing. I attempt to do this and to disprove the theory that by definition English is boring by giving the students physical-stimulus exercises such as The Great Potato Hunt. (Each student describes a potato, and then they exchange potatoes and descriptions and try to match them.) Such exercises get students writing without fear and allow the student to learn heuristically.

(3) The student must have a sense of the finite limits of nonfiction prose. Each physical stimulus exercise exemplifies one of the modes in my theory of discourse; the world of nonfiction prose is divided into that which informs and that which persuades. This simple division makes writing accessible, domesticated, but without the unlimited modes of many rhetoric texts. Thus the student has a handle on his writing.

(4) The student then experiments with the developmental steps of writing going from the blank page to the completed essay. These steps are determining a purpose, finding and narrowing a topic, making lists of specific details about his topic (Cars: carburetor, mag wheels, muffler, tires, etc.), organizing (paragraphs and sentences, transitions), writing to different audiences and in different personae, and of course, and last, spelling and grammar. These steps are introduced separately and with an eye toward novelty. A transition, after all, is the time when Dr. Jekyll is neither himself nor Mr. Hyde, but both. To learn specificity, sit down with a coin and list all its qualities so that someone else could identify it. Writing in different personae is role-playing; we can write to our one Congressperson, on the same issue, as taxpayer, welfare recipient, and student.

(5) The students must be shown that composition has value in the extra-classroom world. I invite speakers from business and industry to speak to students on the value of written communication. Good communicators ultimately save business time and money. Money means jobs, and jobs are important. Students listen. Composition is indeed a survival skill.

(6) And by grading I judge how well a student will survive. But I grade only several papers, rewritten at the end of the course. And since students do not proceed through the course lock step, I have short conferences with each student after every other step of the writing process, approximately bi-weekly. I function as editor, locate one major problem in each paper, and suggest ways that the student can improve it. And the only weaknesses I point out are those skills that have already been practiced. And I find some good--always--in every paper. To grade earlier in the course, or to average grades in any way is to penalize the student for what he didn't know or could not do at the beginning of the course. So, finally, rewritten papers are graded on their quality as they appropriately reflect those skills taught and practiced in the course. The students know what these skills are: purpose, narrow and specific topic, specificity, and so on.

With these premises and practices I have found that students not only approach writing more positively, but become their own best critics. I would like my students to live in a world where they can enjoy language and use it well--not fear it.

A DIAGRAM FOR WRITING*

John Hines
Bowling Green State University

Remember those biology books we used in high school--the big, colorful ones with the transparent overlays of the human body in the middle pages? Sure you do. And remember that the first plastic sheet showed a skeleton with all its femurs and metatarsals and the like? And the second, in pulsating red, had the muscles and veins and arteries (but never the dirty stuff)? And the last one, looking like a roadmap of downtown Phoenix, indicated the central nervous system? The object of these ingenious plastic pages, of course, was to graphically and progressively illustrate the essential parts and functions of human anatomy. And they worked--or at least for me they did. In fact probably the sum total of my knowledge of the biological sciences rests in four or five transparent overlays in a forgotten high-school science book. With this in mind, I think that whoever thought up those simple, colorful, instructive illustrations of the most complex organism in creation should be lionized in every academic auaarter.

But so what? What has thorax to do with syntax? Simply this: the same principle--or device, if you will--that permanently implanted the rudiments of anatomy into my anything-but-scientific mind can be utilized to teach basic English Composition. "Very well," say you. "Prove it."

Several months ago I found myself confronted with what I thought was a particularly uninspired, disinterested and generally lethargic class of Freshman Composition students. I approached sentence generation, paragraph development and the whole canon of the discipline in the standard way. The particulars--sentence structure, punctuation, mechanics--while not accepted with deafening cheers of enthusiasm, somehow got across. Then came organization and development. I still wake up screaming.

What I went through to communicate the simple fact that without an organized thematic pattern to their thoughts, without some system of beginning, developing and concluding an expository essay, the knowledge that my students had assimilated to this point was practically worthless. I won't mention the genuflecting or the bullwhips, but suffice to say I tried everything to get my point across. Then one day I happened to glance at those white computer print-outs we receive with the students' names, ranks, serial numbers and majors. Under the heading "College" I noticed that the great majority of my charges were science majors--biology, chemistry, physics, or math--and a tiny bell rang in my mind: "What," I asked myself, "do scientists relate to most comfortably?" The answer was immediate: "Diagrams!" Another bell rang, this time louder, and I remembered my high-school biology book.

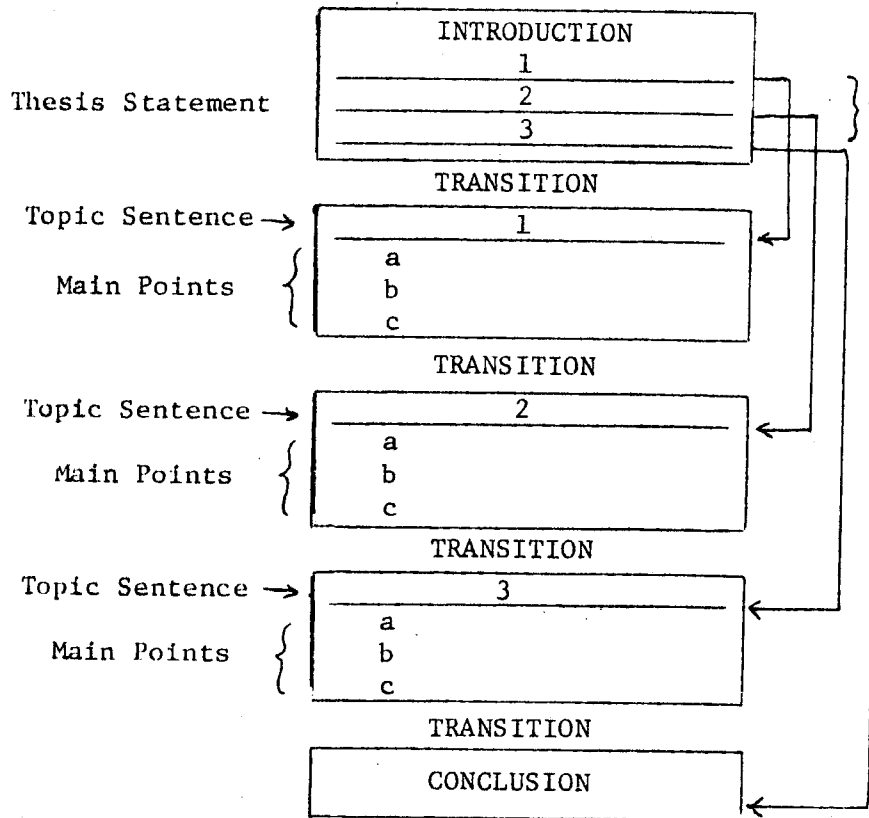
The next class day I came armed with the prettiest diagram of an organized and developed essay you ever saw. It looked like this:

* Reprinted from the English Association of Northwestern Ohio's EANO Bulletin, 16 (Fall 1976), Sara Steen, Editor. If you would like to receive the Bulletin, you can become an EANO member by sending a \$3.00 check to Nancy Byam, EANO Membership, 1883 Riverview Dr., Defiance, OH 43512.

GRAMMAR/USAGE

A distinction should be made between grammar and usage. The former refers to a study of the principles underlying language, the latter to the kind of language called for in particular social situations. Since all normal children adequately learn the basic grammar of their native dialects (for example, the native speaker never makes a mistake like saying "am going I not" . . .), the public clamor actually focuses on dialect-related usage differences, (as in the use of "I ain't goin'" for "I am not going") . . .

("Back to the Basics: Grammar and Usage," SLATE, Vol. 1, No. 3, August 1976.)



To me the diagram looked unendurably boring, but the students loved it. At last they had something graphic in front of them when they wrote. I did the basic diagram in several colors, and added to its format many times throughout the quarter. Every time a new topic was discussed, such as "transitions," I would run off a supplementary explanation of the term which they would attach to the basic blue-print.

What my students had, in the end, was a clear, progressive, schematic booklet that they could refer to, step-by-step, while writing those impossible essays.

"What a fine way to stifle creativity," you say. And I agree, if as far as you go is the framework of the diagram; but in order to teach a nuclear physicist the finer points of creative writing, you must first let him know you know what a gogolplex is.

ARE DIALECT VARIATIONS SURFACE FEATURES OR GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCES?

. . . differences among dialects . . . are always confined to a limited range of surface features that have no effect on what linguists call deep structure, a term that might be roughly translated as "meaning." For instance, the following groups of sentences have minor surface differences, but obviously share meanings:

Mary's daddy is at home.

Mary's daddy is to home.

Mary daddy home.

(Students' Right to Their Own Language, College Composition and Communication, Special Issue, Fall 1974, p. 6.)

[The CCC language statement asks teachers] to accept as perfectly legitimate not merely variations in pronunciation and variations in denotations and connotations of words, but considerable latitude in grammar as well:

. . . for "Mary's daddy is at home," "Mary daddy home" is a quite legitimate substitute. Since the deep structure . . . supposedly remains the same, communication has taken place and thus language has fulfilled its function. In fact, however, the deep structure has not necessarily remained the same; since there is no verb, the reader is required to supply his own: "Mary's daddy came home," "Mary's daddy went home," "Mary's

daddy hates home," etc. . . . Without the apostrophe and s, it is perfectly justifiable to assume that instead of the implied apostrophe-s, there should be an implied and. Thus, "Mary and daddy are at home" . . . (John Rachal, "A Caveat for Educators," Freshman English News, Spring 1976, pp. 14-15.)

SEVEN SORT OF IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT TEACHING WRITING

(Basics that a Lot of Back-to-Basics Advocates Probably Won't Like)

Richard Gebhardt
Findlay College

Writing teachers can hardly turn around these days without tripping over an article about "the basics." Depressingly, the basics heralded in newspaper editorials and newsmagazine cover-stories often are little more than spelling, punctuation, "correct" usage, and respectable test scores. So when the Northwest Ohio Education Association asked me to speak on the subject of "What Are the Basics We Are Supposed to Get Back To?" I found myself trying to redress the balance by emphasizing other kinds of things. The following seven suggestions about what writing teachers should keep central in their teaching are adapted from that talk, given at the NWOEA Day, 27 October 1976.

Writing teachers, first of all, must understand that writing is a complex process. A writer must locate a subject, generate details, find a personal attitude toward the subject, define an intended audience, select appropriate organizing strategies, and revise initial work for greater clarity, appropriateness of tone, and impact on audience. These several steps, however, do not exhaust what the writing process is, nor do they define the necessary order in which the steps occur for any given writer. Different steps may happen simultaneously or unconsciously, and some writers seem to jump over steps so that they seem to write smoothly from mind to final paper. As confusing as the writing process may be, though, this is what a writing class must focus on. For unless it does, students will have no overall idea of the task they are being asked to perform, and so may come to see writing as primarily a matter of punctuation, neat margins, clever titles, avoidance of plagiarism, and a whole gamut of isolated writing features that different teachers have impressed on them over the years.

Students need to learn that they can begin in absolute chaos--while they are "pre-writing" or generating material--and later start to impose order on their pages of chaotic free writings, and still later begin to worry about accuracy of conventions. Without such an awareness of the various stages of composition, students tend to telescope the process together and so try to generate and draft simultaneously, while at the same time trying to proof read. Far more healthy is to teach, as a first basic of writing, that composition is a process of growth and development, beginning in playfulness and moving toward craftsmanship.

The avoidance of early self censorship during the generation of material and the de-emphasis of mechanics by placing them in a fairly late stage of the writing process require some changes in our attitudes about mechanics and usage. And so a second basic that writing teachers and students must understand is that grammar is not usage, or punctuation, or spelling. This sounds ridiculously elementary. But popular terminology tends to lump together everything from ain't to dropped past-tense -ed's to faulty use of colons to subject-verb disagreement into a catch-all called "grammar." And unless writing teachers have a firm grasp on fundamental distinctions between grammar, usage, and mechanical conventions, they

WLA Reading List

THE BASICS

- Dale Adams, "Not Back to Pedagogenic Basics," College Composition and Communication, 27 (Oct. 1976), 264-267.
- Elizabeth Wooten Cowan, "Fractions Make My Head Hurt," College English, 38 (Jan. 1977), 460-465.
- Stephen Dunning and Virginia Redd, "What Are the Basics in English," SLATE, Aug. 1976. This is one in a series of "Starter Sheets" published by the NCTE's Support for Learning and Teaching of English committee. Other starter sets include "Back to Basics: Grammar and Usage," and "Back to Basics: Composition."
- Hans Guth, "Forward to Basics: Developing the Language Potential," Illinois English Bulletin, 63 (Dec. 1975).
- Robert Hogan and Stephen Judy, "The 'Back to Basics' Controversy," Media and Methods, Sept. 1976, pp. 17-18, 54-56.
- Donald Stewart, "A Cautionary Tale: 'The Unteachable Subject,'" Change, 8 (Nov. 1976), 48-51, 63.

may waste valuable time and lose valuable sanity fighting a dialectical variation or transcription error--"He play the piano last night"--as if it were a fundamental confusion of syntax--"Played he night last the piano."

A third thing that teachers and students must understand is that good writing is not writing that sounds learned, but writing that is direct and fits the writer. Studying the writing preferences of 70 high school and college teachers, a University of Chicago teacher found that writing teachers profess the importance of "direct, open, honest writing," but may teach just the opposite values by the way they grade. For instance, the researcher asked teachers which of the following sentences they would rate the higher:

a. There was an investigation into the causes of the changes in the cell by the scientists.

b. The scientists investigated why the cell changed.

The researcher found that 66% of the teachers preferred the wordy, pompous, and somewhat awkward first sentence ("On Teachers' Obtuseness," NCTE Council Grams, May 1976, p. 10). And if my experience with college freshmen is any indication, quite a few teachers in high school and middle school must be grading in such a way that intelligent students are learning to mask their ideas behind language like this:

As a process of the organization and analysis of research, critical thinking provides us with a foundation for the generation of material. Critical thinking is an in-depth mental process in which one considers material available to him in order to produce a sound and reasonable conclusion.

Part of what is wrong with such writing is stylistic--for instance, wordy constructions heavy with abstract words like "process" and "foundation." But much student writing is bad, also, because it is overly general and undersupported. And to attack these key problems of development is a fourth basic for writing classes.

Teachers need to do everything they can to help students see that ideas worth communicating at all deserve to be communicated solidly and fully. We need to do whatever we can to reverse what many teachers see as a growing trend--a proneness to write about the largest of abstract subjects in 300 words of unsupported assertions. We need to draw attention to generalities and to require revision when we receive student drafts as unfocused and as little supported as is this paragraph:

The worst consequence of the rapidly rising cost of living is the lagging wage hike. Wages have not risen fast enough to offset the high prices of all comodities. This does not hurt the upper or upper-middle classes, but really takes its toll on the middle classes on down. It is especially hard on those with large families to support. Some families who were just barely making it a few years ago may now be going hungry. The wages must keep up with rising prices in order to keep the economy rolling because if the people do not have the money to spend this will cause unemployment among those who produce merchandise. If prices and wages rise at an even rate, then essentially conditions would stay the same.

Idea #1
#2
#3
#4

A fifth basic for the writing teacher is to realize that the proper subject of a writing class is writing. Usage and mechanics, of course, should serve supporting roles in the writing calss. But they should be taught at appropriate places in the overall writing process, and not as preeminent replacements for writing. Similarly, literature or current affairs or values clarification may be materials about which students write, but they must not take up so much of the time of teacher or student that they prevent students from writing and revising and re-revising.

Usage can be a problem here, since none of us wants our students to be branded as ignorant by people who attach moral culpability to subject-verb disagreements or the omission of past-tense -ed's. But usage should be approached as part of the rhetorical analysis of the audience and how that audience should be addressed. This is how the NCTE's Commission on Composition put it in an official position statement on the teaching of writing:

Usage is an aspect of rhetoric; learning to predict the social effects of different dialects or different linguistic constructions is part of learning how writing can achieve its purposes. Students should be provided with information that will allow them the largest body of alternatives from which to choose and will help them choose wisely. They should know, for example, that dragged and drug are both used as past tense forms, but that some listeners will react to drug by considering it uneducated. (College English, Oct. 1974, p. 219.)

If students are going to be writing, revising, and re-revising, a sixth basic becomes important. Teachers need to realize that their job is not to go blind reading every word written by every student, but to help students become their own teachers and editors. Too often, teachers make students dependent by marking errors and suggesting revisions. But when they take jobs requiring writing, these students will have no one to catch their unclarities and awkwardnesses--no one except themselves. So the writing teacher should organize classes to help students become self-reliant writers. This means finding ways for students to learn to be readers and editors. And a collateral benefit of such class organizations is that students will take from the teacher some of the burden of reading and responding to papers.

Of course, to implement the previous idea, a teacher needs to recognize a seventh basic: that students are capable of teaching each other a great deal about writing. When several students read a paper, they give its writer more feedback about clarity, effectiveness, and interest than one teacher can give. In his influential "Learning to Write by Writing," James Moffett notes that many of "the comments that teachers write on themes can be made by practically any other person than the author and don't require a specialist." Moffett goes on to write that "failure to allow for the needs of an audience . . . Irrelevance, unnecessary repetition, confusing organization, omitted leads and transitions, anticlimactic endings, are among the things" that student readers can point out to a writer (Teaching the Universe of Discourse, Houghton Mifflin, 1968, p. 195). And Moffett based his comments on students as young as the fourth grade!

The writing teacher, working in such a peer-centered writing environment, is not the sole individual for whom students write, and so writing becomes more natural and less artificial. The teacher does not have to read every scrap of assigned writing. And so the teacher does not have to main his/her eyes, on the one hand, or assign only infrequent papers, on the other. Still, the teacher is in no way abdicating an instructional role. Moffett makes it clear, and I have found this true in my use of collaborative writing approaches, that the teacher must provide guidance to student readers--to keep them from overlooking organizational problems as they attack misplaced commas, for example. The instruction is there. It just takes a new form, as the teacher teaches students to teach themselves.

SKILLS TAUGHT IN ISOLATION ARE NOT BASIC

The current "back to basics" slogan is symbolic of a nationwide concern and belief that the schools have failed in their major mission, which is to develop literate human beings. To laypersons and educators alike, literacy means the ability to read and write. Parents, legislators, and citizens' groups demand that the schools get back to the basics, especially in English. . . . For them, the surest evidence for teaching basic literacy skills comes when teachers isolate aspects of skills . . . and drill them.

We English teachers recognize that aspects of skills are important parts of language learning, but we suspect that true literacy is not just the command of isolated skills. . . . Available research . . . suggests that isolated teaching of skills cannot be justified. The findings suggest that . . . the whole (language acquisition and development) is greater than the sum of its parts (unrelated drill teaching of grammar and spelling mechanics. Specific research is cited.)

("What Are the 'Basics' In English?" SLATE, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 1976.)

WORKSHOP ON ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

Findlay College and the Conference on Ohio English Departments (COED) are planning a summer workshop on English Department Administration in the High School, as a service to chairpersons and English supervisors, and to teachers who would like to develop stronger departments in their schools.

The workshop will address issues emphasized in the By-Laws of COED and in the list of "Recommendations for Secondary English Departments" issued by the NCTE's Conference for Secondary English Department Chairmen. The workshop will involve active group work, as practicing department heads and others interested in effective department administration share ideas about such topics as Hiring Teachers, Evaluating Teachers and Teaching, Building Department Spirit, Running In-Service Programs, Scheduling, and Improving Public Relations.

Final decisions about the date, length, and format of the workshop will be based on a survey sent to department heads in Ohio. If you would like to receive more information, contact the Workshop Coordinator: Richard Gebhardt, English Department, Findlay College, Findlay, OH 45840.

ABOUT WLA NEWSLETTER

-WLA Newsletter is edited by Richard Gebhardt, Findlay College, and Barbara G. Smith, Northern Kentucky University.

-KEY EDITORIAL CONCERNS OF WLA NEWSLETTER

- *The fundamental compatibility of creativity and discipline in good writing and in effective writing instruction.
- *The role of writing classes in freeing student imagination and creativity.
- *Ways that teachers can expand the range of instructional options open to them.

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WLA SUBSCRIPTION

If you would like to be guaranteed of receiving all WLA's from Issue Nine to June 1978, send your name, full address, and \$2.00 to Richard Gebhardt, Findlay College. Make checks to Findlay College*

ARTICLES WELCOME

- WLA welcomes brief (usually under 6 double-spaced pages) articles that relate to the Key Editorial Concerns and grow out of practical experiences in the writing class. More-or-less regular WLA departments:
 - Teaching Tips--2-3 page outlines of a unit or an approach to a specific teaching task.
 - Interconnections--Articles or reviews examining approaches or materials of one level of writing class (e.g., high school, college, middle grades) from the perspective of a different level.
 - Reading Lists--Recommendations (preferably annotated) for reading on a specific subject likely to interest WLA readers.
 - Student Perspectives on the writing teaching enterprise, its methods, its materials.

WLA NEWSLETTER

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