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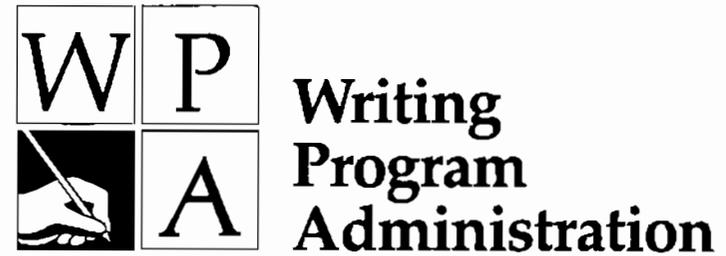
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Writing Program Administration

Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators
Volume 10, Numbers 1-2, Fall-Winter, 1986

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Writing Assessment: An Evaluation Paradigm

Harvey S. Wiener

The pressure for accountability in postsecondary education continues to build. Recent reports from the National Institute of Education and the Association of American Colleges indict the academy for inattention to assessment, which both documents insist is a key indicator of an institution's health. It is hard to fault the conclusions of these reports. Although I do not wish to minimize some of the strides we are making in large-scale assessment efforts—the innovative programs at Alverno College, for example, the Exxon funded consultation and evaluation project of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the Student Outcomes Project of the University of Tennessee, to name just a few—at the classroom level, where teachers must judge what students have learned or need to learn, we have few paragons. For humanistic studies, accountability is particularly complex and hard to manage. However, it is not likely that we can shrug our shoulders in puzzlement much longer as the public continues to demand systems for measuring achievement in all quarters. Either we face the challenge of developing our own tests, or we submit to inferior schemes by testing specialists or their surrogates on the fringes of the academic discipline.

Over the last decades teachers of English composition have wrestled with the issue of testing student writers and have devised an assessment system whose history is a notable model for the profession at large. What I wish to suggest here is that the development of current tests for writers is a paradigm for how other liberal studies faculties can shape valid assessment programs that reflect the important tenets of their disciplines.

In early efforts to assess writers, the multiple choice exam was the most ubiquitous testing format. Having thought little about the relation between evaluation and instructional goals, we listened to outside testing experts, who insisted that with a series of questions on usage, grammar, and syntax, the darkened boxes on answer sheets would provide "predictive validity," a crystal ball for students' writing skills. We could determine entry-level proficiency, for example, without asking students to write a word. But it wasn't long before many teachers of writing rejected assessment measures that did not demand the construction of sentences. Thus, the "writing sample" test grew in prominence.

(In a 1983 survey of member institutions of the National Testing Network in Writing, 69% of the respondents reported that they assessed writing with a writing sample. Many of these are locally developed and scored tests.) The new model departed from accepted testing principles: Writing samples took too much time, cost too much money, and taxed teaching faculties quite severely. Yet the move from a short answer test to a sustained written response was an important positive step. The act of writing calls for language and syntax specific to individual thinkers. Testing students on weaknesses in someone else's prose had little utility, even though information to be gathered from the tests was inexpensive, could be easily quantified, and might imply students' later successes. With a writing sample, English teachers drew upon their knowledge of current composition theory, sound teaching practices, and writing assessment models developed by national testing agencies in order to devise an acceptable evaluation format. To judge writing, you looked at writing, and that was that.

Despite the advance to a new type of test, many writing teachers clung nonetheless to the values of the older model, which viewed writing as a technology. Thus, we simply counted errors—seven or eight mistakes, and the paper failed. Error counting paid no attention to the nature of thinking in writing and offered not much improvement over the machine-scored test. Examining the surface features of written language is certainly the easiest way to attend to a piece of prose, but it is also the least important in telling what students need to know and learn.

In the next phase of the paradigm I am outlining, teachers of writing moved to a much more complex and demanding view of assessment, one based upon thought *and* expression in the writer's prose. To look at the contents of a piece of writing produced under restrictions of time and format and demanding rapid evaluation for placing students into appropriate courses or programs, evaluators had to develop a scoring system that would lead to sound judgments. With research, hard work, and much experimentation several such systems have emerged over the years. We now have various methods of looking at an essay besides counting its mistakes; these methods all insist that what the writer says and how the writer says it are the true, integrated territory for appropriate evaluation.

What I am suggesting is that in a humanistic discipline like writing, the concerted efforts of faculty can lead to evaluation instruments and designs that are both manageable and responsive to the complexity of the task awaiting judgment. I admit that I have oversimplified the development of the paradigm. It is not linear, and it does not always run on a smooth track. Several institutions still assess writing without asking

students to write. Some English teachers have closed their eyes to the need for valid writing assessment models and the recent progress made in devising them. Others still argue for machine-scored "objective" tests. And certainly supporters and detractors of the popular scoring systems are waging their wars to this very moment. (Witness the December 1984 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, a battleground given over exclusively to testing concerns for the first time.) Still, the important consideration here is that by 1985 many institutions have moved from writing assessment rooted in quantification to writing assessment rooted in informed and carefully monitored personal responses. For any of the methods of evaluation that enlightened writing faculties now used in grading a student's prose, teachers collaborate on goals and standards, rate papers in groups and under supervision, and adapt their individual perceptions of quality writing to the perceptions of their colleagues. These collaborative efforts at assessment have developed through continuous discussion and analysis at individual campuses, at local forums, and through national publications and conferences.

Ongoing conversation with colleagues has helped writing faculty move away from quantification and idiosyncratic personal judgments of a writer's prose to personal judgments based on collaboration and shared visions. By creating conditions for making defensible judgments, we have established a method for assessing the kinds of complex performances so typical of humanistic study. This is the model to lay alongside the data-driven, number-haunted statistics that dominate educational evaluation. Teachers of writing have nurtured a paradigmatic alternative to what is frequently mindless quantification. The current state of writing assessment asserts that a concerned, interactive professoriate can establish commonalities for judgment and can anchor them in rational thought and liberal learning. About this kind of evaluation many will sneer "soft data" and "subjective." But soft data in this case is human data, the record of minds thinking, judging, and evaluating writing, an act that is itself quintessentially an effort of thought, judgment, and evaluation. Only human minds can evaluate another mind's thoughts.

And if this is subjectivity, writing teachers have made the most of it. The NIE report complains that with new technologies we risk the loss of "human and subjective elements from both assessment and learning" and that "We do no great service to students by pretending that subjectivity does not exist in judgments of performance in the world. . . ." Undeniably, objective quantification is useful; when teachers of writing collate the numerical representations of their judgments of student writing and relate them to each other and to the public, they are

in debt to numbers and statistics, charts and graphs. But the collaborative procedures writing teachers have evolved over the years demonstrate sensitive evaluation efforts based on the most important commodity in the humanistic enterprise, the mind in intellectual negotiation with peers.

Local assessment models initiated and developed by faculty are a relatively new and welcome addition to the educational enterprise. Unschooled in statistics and psychometrics, many humanists believe that they cannot influence an already entrenched testing establishment. They cringe at the apparent *reductio* of numbers, validations, statistical significances, *n*'s, and cohorts. They have looked the other way as professional testing agencies, and not classroom teachers, have developed entrance, proficiency, and licensing exams for undergraduates and graduates. They have permitted legislatures to promulgate competencies and have allowed state governments to mandate and oversee the testing of students' skills. The Florida State Department of Education, for example, has created the College Level Academic Skills Test for all students in the state, and has prescribed the number of pages to be written each week in writing classes. Similar efforts await action in other states. Certainly these are faculty, not legislative prerogatives. Yet when faculty do not act, they abdicate, and in the end, must be prepared to serve what may be an uninformed, unsympathetic, and unwelcome ruler.

About assessment, evaluation, and accountability, it seems to me that the AAC report is right: "In a society where survival and growth are often the only tests of virtue, colleges and universities have paid too little attention to an assessment of their performance." This is a gauntlet that educators must seize quickly. The evolution of writing assessment as a force in educational testing is a promising model for those who seek to define evaluation procedures that grow from sound academic principles and not simply from the expediencies of budget offices, campus testing services, or legislative mandates. Only from the imperatives of subject matter and the teachers committed to it grow the designs for accurate and valid assessment.



Reading, Writing, and Thinking: High School/College Connections

Karen Spear and Barbara Maloney

Nearly 20 years ago, Francis Christensen observed, “we do not really teach our captive charges to write better—we merely *expect* them to” (3). Since then, college writing programs have made considerable gains in teaching writing. High school English teachers, however, have been less able to channel their expectations about students’ writing into effective pedagogies. A restricted range of reading materials, limited opportunities for writing, and highly traditional teaching practices keep many high school students from understanding and practicing the multiple roles and functions of discourse.

This is a study of high school English.¹ But its more important implications are for college writing programs. The study not only sheds some light on why entering college students have some of the problems they do with writing, it also suggests parallels between the shortcomings of high school writing instruction and those of college programs. Unless writing program administrators have a detailed understanding of high school preparation, they risk creating freshman writing curricula based largely on guesswork about what students must have done, on hazy recollections about what, as freshmen, writing program administrators may themselves have done, or on a stiffnecked insistence on what freshmen ought to have done. By better understanding the nature of reading, writing, and thinking in the secondary English curriculum, writing program administrators are more likely to avoid repeating a critical flaw in secondary language instruction: the unquestioned expectation that students should already be able to read, write, and think at relatively high levels of abstraction.

Reading, Writing, and Thinking in Secondary English

In the fall of 1983, 144 high school English teachers in the Salt Lake metropolitan area responded to an extensive questionnaire asking them to describe their teaching practices and expectations about their students’ abilities in reading, writing, and thinking. The study represents teachers from 17 high schools in six school districts, yielding a healthy response rate of 90%. The purpose of the study was to find out whether secondary English instruction in these critical language areas was con-

sistent with teachers' perceptions of their students' needs and abilities and with current thinking about effective language instruction. We were less interested in the validity of teachers' beliefs about their work than in the beliefs themselves, since these beliefs largely determine what and how any teacher teaches. We were especially curious to discover what kinds of consistency these teachers were able to achieve within the three language areas of their curriculum: whether, for example, the reading program complemented the writing program, whether the writing program was consistent with teachers' cognitive goals, and so forth. While the study is not a definitive analysis of secondary English teaching, the data achieve enough internal consistency and statistical reliability to warrant some tentative observations.

The questionnaire contained parallel sets of questions on students' reading, writing, and thinking abilities, and on teaching practices in these areas. Figure 1 represents the parallelism we established among these abilities. Using a Likert scale of 1-7, teachers uniformly rated students highest in the most concrete of these abilities—literal comprehension in reading, reporting of information in grammatically correct written form, and memorization—and lowest in the abilities requiring more abstract, independent thought. Overall, however, they considered students' abilities in all three areas average or below.

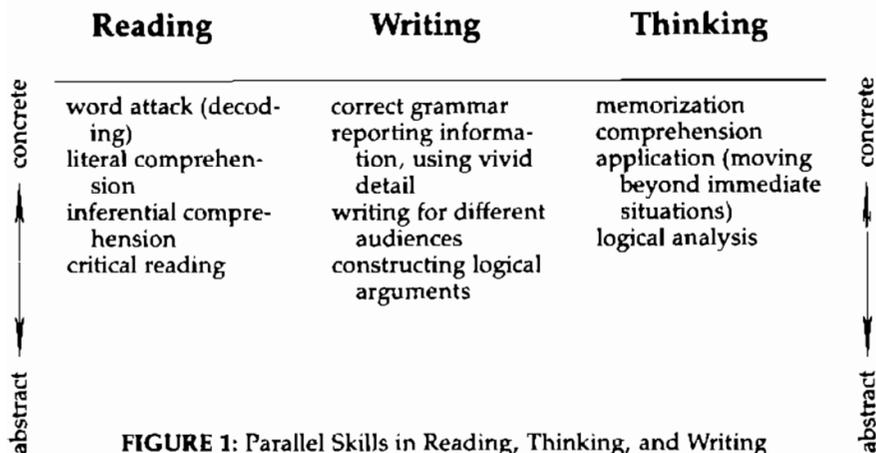


FIGURE 1: Parallel Skills in Reading, Thinking, and Writing

These perceptions of students' reading, writing, and thinking abilities are significant in view of the contrasts with reported teaching practices. In English classes, high school students primarily read fiction and poetry. Yet despite their dissatisfaction with students' reading, teachers seldom use even the most basic techniques for reading instruction such as identifying new vocabulary or previewing a text, and they almost never individualize reading assignments or allow students to choose their own material.

Writing, as Applebee and others have also shown, is primarily in the form of short answer and paragraph-length responses, and it is used essentially to validate reading comprehension. Teachers in our study reported that students write, on average, once a week, a figure that is somewhat misleading because it includes short answer assignments. Thus, Applebee's conclusion seems equally appropriate here: "One of the major problems with an overemphasis on mechanical writing tasks is that the students may never learn to use such resources as their own, relying instead upon the structure or scaffold that the teacher has provided" (101). Moreover, although teachers seem to expect critical/analytic writing to derive from students' reading, they do not recognize the highly specialized and abstract nature of the discourse they are really looking for: literary criticism. The infrequency of extended writing assignments, those in which writers might go beyond reporting what they read, combined with the absence of audiences other than the teacher, provide powerful reinforcement for the low levels of thinking, reading, and writing the teachers complain about. Although the overwhelming majority of high school teachers report that logical organization and thorough development of ideas are for them the most important qualities of good writing, their assignments and teaching practices offer almost no opportunity for students to learn these skills. Teachers apparently expect students to write analytically and read critically, but little in their daily practice is devoted to teaching either one.

Conversely, non-literary reading materials (such as correspondence, reportage, or actual trade materials) and concrete writing assignments (such as the preparation of letters, advertisements, booklets, or newsletters) are almost non-existent. Yet, unlike literary readings, these reading materials often have definite audiences and specific purposes, as do writing assignments that might be tied to them. These more concrete assignments for reading and writing could introduce secondary students to fundamental concepts about selection of material, the problems of presenting it to one audience rather than another, the differences between data and opinions, thesis and support—in short, all the rhetorical and conceptual problems that are obscured in esoteric writing assignments about symbolism in *Heart of Darkness*. (Table 1 summarizes the means for teachers' reports on teaching practices and student abilities in reading, writing, and thinking.)

TABLE 1. High and Low Means for Teachers' Reports on Reading, Writing, and Thinking
 (Scale: 1-7)

	High	Low	
Reading	Ability	Strongest in literal comprehension (4.5)	Weakest in critical reading (3.6)
	Assignments	Most frequent in fiction/poetry (5.6)	Least often newspapers, magazines, and other non-fiction primary sources (2.9)
	Teaching Practices	Most often assess reading by asking students to demonstrate comprehension in writing (5.7)	Least often: vary reading assignments for weak or strong readers (3.5)
Writing	Ability	Strongest in reporting information (4.6)	Weakest in writing for varied audiences (3.6) and developing a logical argument (3.8)
	Assignments	Most often write short answers (5.2), paragraphs (5.1), and personal experience essays (4.4)	Least often write advertisements (1.9), letters (2.8), news articles, (2.6), or pamphlets (1.7)
	Teaching Practices	Most often assign essay tests (5.3) and writing based on reading assignments (5.6)	Least often assign writing for varied audiences (3.8); provide opportunities for peer feedback and revision (3.8)
Thinking	Ability	Most able to perform tasks involving memorization (4.6)	Least able to perform tasks involving analysis (3.8)

Secondary English teachers seem to be good diagnosticians of their students' strengths and weaknesses with language. What they seem less able to perceive are the causal relationships between their own teaching practices and the limitations they find in their students. In her conclu-

sions about secondary teaching from studying twelfth graders' composing processes, Janet Emig concluded that "much of the teaching of composition in American high schools is probably too abstract for the average and below average students" (99). The present study helps to confirm that claim and extends Emig's conclusion. It's not just the restricted mode of writing so pervasive in secondary school and the ways teachers talk about writing that perplex high school students. The contradictory messages conveyed by so many "report-what-you-know" assignments coupled with the indigestibility of the regular diet of reading and writing also seem to play a major role. The de facto definition of writing as reportage probably promotes the conviction, staunchly held by college freshmen, that writing is a matter of asserting "the facts"—whether these facts are baldly literal statements from reading or, ironically, the equally unchallengeable truths of personal belief and opinion.

The most troublesome aspect of our study is our nagging suspicion that the teachers' reports are somewhat inflated—that the picture of the high school English curriculum that emerged is probably rosier than high school classrooms really are. Informal followup interviews with several participants lead us to conclude that many teachers, despite our admonitions not to, felt the need to report more on what they believe they should do than on what they actually do. Thus, the actual frequency of good teaching practices (assigning writing longer than a paragraph, varying reading assignments for individual students, designing writing assignments for a particular audience or purpose, or making writing available for peer feedback) is very likely less than what is reported here.

To gain some inferential support for this observation, we used a relatively new statistical technique called a multiple regression path analysis. This technique allowed us to locate clusters of teachers according to demographic similarities and to identify significant relationships among specific teaching practices, assignments in reading and writing, and beliefs about students' language skills. By allowing us to look beyond the rough indication of trends provided by the means, this analysis lets us see how teaching practices and assignments are related. All the observations that follow are at a confidence level of .05 or better.

On the positive side, those few teachers who use peer feedback to provide an audience and purpose for a piece of writing and who provide opportunities for revision tend to make more innovative and varied reading and writing assignments. Teachers with more advanced students (usually those teachers with advanced preparation and more years of experience) devise the most varied and innovative assignments in reading and writing. They also think about problems of audience in their

writing assignments, and they most regularly ask students to share their work for the purposes of revision. On the other hand, by far the greater proportion of teachers, though who work mainly with average or below-average students, are also those who are most dependent on rigid reading lists and formulaic, teacher-centered writing. Unfortunately, these students probably need the most concreteness and variation in their work, even though they receive the least. Finally, the cluster of teachers who show more variety and innovation also tend to be most critical of their students' reading and writing abilities, while the bulk of teachers, who rely on formulaic writing assignments, restricted reading lists, and other traditional practices, rate their students' reading and writing abilities somewhat higher. While this finding might be taken to justify the continued onslaught of back-to-basics, it seems more likely that most teachers are simply complacent about their students' performance, failing to challenge their students or be challenged by them.

By examining writing in the context of thinking and reading skills, we were interested in looking at the role of writing not in relation to the content of the curriculum, but in relation to the basic learning processes of reading and thinking about that reading. In all three areas—reading, writing and thinking—teachers expect students to operate at higher levels than they do, yet they fail to teach the preliminary or supporting skills that would let them realize their expectations. They expect students to read critically, but rate them highest in literal comprehension; they expect students to think analytically but rate them highest in memorization; they expect students to write logically about worthwhile topics but rate them highest in being able to report information.

In the broadest sense, what is lacking is the implementation of teaching practices that present all these skills as interrelated processes. The product approach, "I assign it, you do it," continues to dominate. Within this approach, however, are more subtle but equally self-defeating practices. Although virtually all writing is based on reading (which is almost exclusively literary writing), reading and writing are not introduced as processes or ways of knowing. The absence of prereading activities such as asking students to predict what a text will be about, or discussing the relationship of a new text to previous subject matter keeps secondary students from understanding how reading, thinking about reading, and writing about reading are intimately linked within the individual. Further, the almost total absence from the secondary curriculum of any self-selected reading fails to teach students that one might conceivably read to find out something of interest or importance, or write about that reading to explore it further or to express what has been discovered. In short, students fail to understand their own role in making meaning, assuming instead that meaning is something Out There that gets imprinted on them like a tattoo.

The purposelessness of their reading is echoed in the purposelessness of their writing: our study, like others on secondary writing, showed an almost total absence of writing for any audience other than the teacher, and for any purpose other than to fulfill an assignment and demonstrate mastery of course content. If students read, write, and think at the literal level as their teachers complain, they seem to be called upon to do little else. In fact, they seem never to learn how to do the very things their teachers expect them to do, so their low-level performance in each of the three areas simply reinforces their performance in the others.

Implications for College Writing Programs

The most important implication of this study for writing program administrators is this: many of our most central ideas about writing are alien, if not antagonistic to the view of writing that students acquired in secondary school. State colleges and universities with open admissions policies are likely to have the highest numbers of students who, considered average in high school, were exposed to the most limited of teaching practices. Although students have learned the basic vocabulary of writing—audience, revision, thesis, drafting, and the like—they have not had opportunities to apply these concepts to their own writing in sustained or varied ways. Their experiences with writing have simply not been such that they have learned to meet their teachers' foremost expectations for logically organized, intellectually worthwhile writing. What seems more prevalent in their experience is formulaic writing where purpose and audience are obscured by requirements that specify the length, shape, or type of the final product. Students have not had regular opportunities to do writing that is sustained enough to encourage the disciplined, independent thinking that enables a person to wrap his or her mind around a concept and turn it into a controlling idea—at least one that has the subtlety and complexity we normally want to see in college writing. If, for secondary students, writing derives from reading, which is primarily literature read at the level of literal comprehension, then writing is little more than reporting literary events to a teacher, based on only a superficial understanding of plot and character. Expecting flexibility and breadth from students whose writing experience has been this constricted is a little like expecting an assembly line worker to transform herself into a robotics engineer merely by changing her title.

To help students reshape their understanding of writing as they enter college, they need to practice it and understand it in as wide a context as possible. To borrow James Moffett's terminology, they need to record, report, generalize, and theorize for a range of audiences from

the self to the distant other. Like the secondary teachers we surveyed, college writing teachers cannot take for granted their students' abilities to think, read, or write at the higher reaches of the cognitive scale. Instead, we need to recognize their strong tendency to view writing simply as reportage and thus develop our own courses in ways that build upward from this base, helping students along the way to recognize how analyzing, interpreting, or evaluating ideas presupposes but also differs from written recitation.

Further, we need to take into consideration the limitations of students' reading experiences and emphasize the interdependence of reading and writing, especially using texts in a variety of areas besides the literary. Given their limited reading experience, we probably need to be especially careful not to fall into the same trap that ensnares secondary teachers—the assumption that entirely on their own, students can read a text critically and insightfully. Anthologies that barrage students with an array of discourse forms on a broad range of interesting but unrelated subject areas (sometimes held together only by a loose abstraction like "The Individual and Society" or "Technology") may be as impenetrable in their own way as the highly specialized demands of literary criticism that bewildered students in high school. There now seems to be no question that reading comprehension is essentially contextual.² We understand a particular text largely on the basis of what we already know about the subject generally. Otherwise, to draw on a dietary metaphor, ingesting a smorgasbord of reading delights without adequate preparation of the system leads to rather dyspeptic writing.

Therefore, college programs, like high school programs, need to integrate writing and reading instruction in ways that move students beyond memorizing and reporting information. To do so, writing curricula probably should be more tightly organized than they often are around specific bodies of information, with assignments governed by specific cognitive or rhetorical tasks. In essence, until high school English teaching undergoes radical reform, college writing programs need to incorporate much of what is prescribed here for high school writing programs. Far from turning college writing instruction into high school remediation, this study suggests that the diversity and concreteness of reading, writing, and cognitive tasks that undergird higher order skills could vastly strengthen programs at both levels.³

More research needs to be done to explore pressing questions about the intellectual readiness of secondary students to engage in the formal reasoning processes necessary for mature writing. Although writing development may be closely bound up with issues of emotional or chronological maturity, our study suggests that entering students' lack of rhetorical and conceptual skill derives in large measure from their

restrictive experiences with language and ideas in secondary school. Whether a writing program at any level is conceived as a service course to the writing of other disciplines or is more broadly epistemological in its focus, writing courses themselves need to achieve close and meaningful ties among reading, writing, and thinking activities so students obtain a clear sense of how they are manipulating words and ideas to make meaning. Without a curriculum that accounts for the need to *develop* mature discourse, a need that goes largely unrecognized in high school, we need to ask ourselves whether college writing instruction is repeating the shortcomings of secondary writing instruction, where so much occurs by accident, so little by design.

Notes

¹We wish to thank the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Utah for funding this research.

²For some useful material on reading as a contextual activity, see the following: Kenneth Goodman, "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game," *Journal of the Reading Specialist* 6 (1967); Kenneth Goodman, "Psycholinguistic Universals in the Reading Process," in Frank Smith (ed.), *Psycholinguistics and Reading*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); and Frank Smith, *Essays into Literacy*, (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1983).

³For applications of reading theory to college writing instruction, see Marilyn Sternglass, "Integrating Instruction in Reading, Writing, Reasoning" in Janice Hays, et. al. (eds.), *The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking*, (Urbana, NCTE, 1983).

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Evaluating High School Writing: What Are Teachers Really Looking For?

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Introduction

On a typical day, directors of college composition are likely to receive—along with the inevitable stack of textbook brochures—a request from a high school somewhere in the state for information about our college writing program: what texts do we prefer? how many papers do we require? what kinds of papers are they? and how are they graded? Clearly, high school teachers and administrators look to college programs for direction. And most program administrators dutifully answer the letters and questionnaires because we hope our answers will somehow affect the way writing is taught in the high school and ultimately the quality of students we see in our programs. Such correspondence is the beginning, however informal, of collaboration between high school and college writing programs.

Program administrators today recognize that their responsibilities extend beyond the campus gates. A recent MLA publication spotlights 16 programs across the country where colleges and high schools collaborate to promote better relationships, to find ways they can solve mutual problems, and—perhaps most important—to assure consistency and continuity in writing classes from high school to college.¹ It may well be that better communications between college and secondary educators can improve writing programs at all levels.

Improved writing is the major goal of a collaborative effort at Miami University organized by the Ohio Writing Project for the Ohio Board of Regents. Its name is the Early English Composition Assessment Program, and it assesses compositions written under controlled conditions by high school juniors. As part of the program, high school teachers come to Miami University to evaluate essays in scoring sessions patterned on the collaborative model of the Educational Testing Service. At the beginning of each session, approximately fifty teachers spend sev-

eral hours discussing the scoring scale, the rating criteria, and—most importantly—sample student papers. Because such sessions enable teachers to test their evaluation criteria against those of their colleagues and, in a relatively non-threatening environment, to rethink their own standards and values, they are opportunities for professional growth. After all, many of us have never before scored a paper along with fifty colleagues and then discussed with them the reasons for assigning the grade we did. It is a situation which invites us to learn from each other. It is also a situation which clarifies what teachers look for in evaluating high school writing.

The papers that teachers evaluated in the fall of 1985 were all written in response to the following question:

Explain as clearly and specifically as you can whether you think American society treats men and women and/or girls and boys as equals or whether you think the two sexes are treated differently. In your explanation, you might want to tell a story about yourself or your friends, to use description, and to refer to men and women in movies, in books, and on television. In any case be sure to use examples, illustrations, and other details to make your explanation interesting and informative.²

Student essays were evaluated on a six-point scoring scale with “6” the highest grade and “1” the lowest (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Scoring Scale

Grades	Description
5/6	Clearly above average papers which demonstrate strength in virtually all the criteria. Rarely are these flawless papers, but they are usually substantial in content and often original in idea and/or expression. A “5” tends to be thinner or weaker in some ways than a clearly superior “6.”
3/4	Papers ranging from slightly below average (“3”) to slightly above average (“4”), either combining strengths with weaknesses in various criteria or showing an overall sense of underdevelopment.
1/2	Clearly below average papers which fail to demonstrate competence in several of the criteria (often because the paper is too short) or which are generally empty or which fail to respond to the question. A “2” tends to have redeeming qualities absent in a “1.”

To decide which grade on the scoring scale to assign, raters used five criteria (Table 2). But before scoring “live” papers, all raters—following standard ETS procedure—practiced using the five criteria to grade a series of sample papers that represented the full range of the scoring scale.

TABLE 2. Rating Criteria

Criterion	Description
Ideas	The extent to which the thoughts and content of the essay are original, insightful, and clear.
Supporting Details	The extent to which the ideas of the essay are supported by examples and details which are specific, appropriate, and fresh.
Unity and Organization	The extent to which the parts of the essay develop its whole and to which the parts of the essay are clearly and logically connected to each other.
Sentence Structure	The extent to which variety, maturity, and effectiveness of sentence structure is achieved.
Diction and Usage	The extent to which wording and phrasing are accurate, expressive, and concise and to which the principles of grammar and the conventions of standard English are, when appropriate, observed.

Raters’ Questionnaire

Once the scoring of “live” papers began, we started looking for student essays that would receive the same score from virtually all raters. That is, we were searching for papers on which there was little or no disagreement, papers which for one reason or another achieved consensus in scoring. We had little difficulty finding what we sought: each of the six papers produced below received the identical score from four separate raters. Each rater then completed a written questionnaire designed to elicit the reasons for that score. The questionnaire, a simple one, consisted of four items:

1. Please explain as clearly and specifically as you can the major reason you gave this paper the grade you did.

2. Please explain any other reasons for giving the paper the grade you did.
3. Was this paper an easy one to grade? Please explain why or why not.
4. Please explain any other reactions to the paper that might have influenced the grade you gave it.

Responses to the four items helped us determine what teachers look for when they evaluate student writing. The discussion below, based on those responses, begins with middle-range papers—those judged either slightly below average (“3”) or slightly above average (“4”). It then turns to papers in the lower range (“1” and “2”) and upper range (“5” and “6”).

Middle-Range Papers

A “3” Paper

In American society men and women are treated differently in many ways. It all started a long time ago. Women were not permitted to have a job, the women's place was at home. Men thought that the only things that women were good for is cleaning, doing wash, cooking, and caring for the children.

As time passes things do change. I think men still feel the same way about a woman's place being at home, but today, its the women's decision on wether she is going to have a career or not, or wether or not she is going to stay home and be a housewife or if she wants a part time job.

Although some things have changed in favor for the women, there are still some thing that men are concidered “better” at than women. There are three times more men doctors than women doctors. There are many more judges that are men compared to the women judges.

Maybe in the next ten or twenty years this will also change. America is a changing country which matures in several ways every year.

One very important thing that I feel will never change is that their will never be a women president. People believe that men are more educated in certain matters concerning other countries, and things to do with polotics. But you never know, some brave women might run

for presidency some day, but I don't look for that to happen for a long time, but this is my own opinion.

Therefore what I'm trying to say in this ESSAY is that men and women will never be treated equally in every way. Things have changed in the past and things will keep on changing. But I feel that men and women will never be treated totally as equals.

Analysis of Raters' Response

On the six-point scale, this paper was consistently rated “3” or “slightly below average” in overall quality. Moreover, the raters who scored the paper a “3” considered it relatively easy to evaluate: they were equally certain that it was neither “slightly above average” (a “4”) nor “clearly below average” (a “2” or “1”).

The central weakness of the paper, the raters further agreed, is its lack of supporting material, the almost complete lack of specific examples, illustrations, and details. There are, to be sure, some specifics here. The writer does assert that male doctors outnumber female doctors three to one and that there are more male judges as well. He further notes that men are often thought to be superior politicians, especially in conducting foreign policy. But since neither these nor other points are explained or developed, the paper does not become sufficiently interesting or informative to deserve a “4.”

It was precisely the lack of development and the paucity of supporting material that prevented the raters from scoring the paper a “4.” One rater wrote, “Had I seen more facts, I believe I would have rated the paper ‘4’ or even ‘5.’ ” A second rater commented that the examples “were not developed well enough to earn the paper a ‘4.’ ” A third rater cited the absence of “crisp, specific examples to support the thesis” as a major reason for scoring the paper a “3.”

So it was primarily the paper's failure to support, develop, and otherwise elaborate upon its key assertions that made it below average in quality. But the raters pointed to other if less important problems—occasional irrelevancies, an immature style, and errors of grammar and spelling. Perhaps because the paper was organized chronologically rather than analytically, raters felt that it was sometimes off topic. The paper is also weakened by an immature style—most obvious in sentences like “There are many more judges that are men compared to the women judges.” Finally, the paper suffers from errors in tense consistency, sentence boundaries, possessive constructions, and spelling. Still, neither the errors nor the stylistic immaturity nor the irrelevancies weighed as heavily with the raters as the lack of specific examples and supporting details.

What makes the paper "slightly" rather than "clearly" below average in quality? According to the raters, the paper merits the score of "3" rather than "2" because it addresses the assignment and because its content is substantial and its expression clear. One rater characterized the paper as "rather clear and logical. The argument was concise and to the point." Moreover, the paper follows an intelligible order: it begins with the past, moves to the present, and concludes with a glimpse of the future. And this movement through time is appropriately signalled by connectives like "As time passes" and "Although some things have changed." In fact, the paper had enough promise for one rater to lament, "I didn't want to grade it, only discuss it and have it rewritten." If the paper were to be rewritten, the raters would advise the student to concentrate on examples and specific details.

A "4" Paper

In American society today, I feel that men and women are not treated as equals. Men in most cases have the better paying job for the same kind of work done. In a factory that my aunt used to work for, she had worked there longer than this one man, she done the same kind & amount of work that the man did but she got paid a lower wage because she was a woman.

I also feel that men are looked up to more than women are in a business or company. For example, on this one television show I was watching, the man was a "head" of his company and of a similar company, a lady was the "head" of that company and when it came for the Cartel to do business with the best company they saw fit to complete this "deal", they picked the man's company just because he was a man and they felt that a woman could not complete "the deal" to their liking.

Most women are not thought upon as being able to do a man's job when indeed there are alot of men's jobs that women can do but not at all. That does not mean that men should discriminate or wrongly judge women just because they are of the female sex. I feel that women should be respected & thought upon as a equal human being if they can do a man's job.

Most men have the thought that women are just play things & should do what most women did before women's lib—clean the house, have kids, raise them, go to church & be a good Christian mother, make supper, & be there when the man *wants* them.

Whenever you hear about some women doing something spectacular or out of the usual, the society always says, the place for the

women is in the house cooking and raising kids, not doing a man's job. I feel that a man should be in the kitchen & raising kids just as much as the woman does that.

In the case of boys and girls being equals, there is a little skepticism there too! *Both* sexes, in children, feel that they are more better than the other. For example, most girls are asked to do a lot more responsible things than boys are. Like if a mother or father wants something from the store he is more likely to ask the girl than the boy, for she is more responsible.

But boys are looked as better than girls because when there is some kind of activity involving a little physical strength, they ask the boy rather than the girl. The boys are always thought as being strong and the girls smart and responsible.

On the whole, I feel that women are not looked as equals of men, that they are below men and that girls & boys are not looked as equals and both, in different situations, are looked to be better than the other.

Analysis of Raters' Responses

This paper seems to characterize "slightly above average" papers in style, in development, and in diction; in all these areas, the raters noted moments of resonance and moments of dissonance. They praised the writer's control over grammar, ideas, and rhetoric. As one rater noted, the paper was "above average in examples and was fairly well unified." But the writer's inability to capitalize on her successes earned criticism as well. "Although the paper had some substance, it could have presented in a more interesting manner," went a typical comment.

The paper contained stylistically mature sentences, sentences that deftly handle multiple noun clauses and apposition: "Most men have the thought that women are just play things & only should do what most women did before women's lib—clean the house, have kids, raise them, go to church & be a good Christian mother, make supper, & be there whenever the man *wants* them." But the paper does not maintain a mature style. It occasionally tangles syntax and confuses verb forms: "In a factory that my aunt used to work for, she had worked there longer than this one man, she done the same kind & amount of work that the man did but she got paid a lower wage because she was a woman."

In the same way, the paper promises substantial development but falls short. It opens, for instance, with a topic statement: "In American society today, I feel that men and women are not treated as equals."

Then it narrows the topic with, "Men in . . . most cases have the better paying job for the same kind of work done." And it even supports the topic statement with a personal illustration: the writer's aunt was paid a lower wage than a man "because she was a woman." But other examples are vague and thin. In the second paragraph, for instance, we are told about a television show in which a man defeats a woman in a business deal simply because he is a man, yet we are given few specifics about the incident. So the raters generally agreed that the paper could have had "better ideas and more complete examples."

One rater, who commented on both syntax and diction, admitted she wanted to lower the paper to a "3" because of grammatical problems like "she done." But she decided that a writer who could write long, sophisticated sentences and use words like "*skepticism* and *discriminate* . . . had an above average command of language." The rater finally gave the paper a "4" because she "did not want to see the student go unrewarded for the good points." The essence of a "4" seems to be that it struggles with sophisticated techniques—in style, in development, in diction—with only partial success.

Lower-Range Papers

A "1" Paper

Shortness often signals a "1" paper even before raters begin to read it. Like the following, most "1" papers cover less than a handwritten page.

My Cousin, She thinks she's the girl of all girl's and boy's. She thinks she is the super girl of the 80's. She tries to act like a boy, walk like a boy, talk like a boy. Pu it this way, she does everything like a boy. God doesn't make mistakes but when he made her a girl he made a big one. So hey I think that boys and Girls should be treated equally to a certain extent.

Analysis of Raters' Responses

Though the paper responds to the topic only indirectly, no raters remarked on its failure to address the question. What they did remark on was the paper's errors. The comments reveal that when there's so little content to pique their interest, raters become preoccupied with error. Even more so than in longer papers, it seems. Two commented that spotting errors was easy because there was only a single paragraph. "Capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure were all abused," one remarked.

Similarly, raters tended to focus on errors in another "1" paper, one of only three sentences: "Men and woman are treated the same to me. But, I don't like women working in factoryes that are dangerous and hard work. You always hear women say that they can do anything that a man can do and probably better and we know they can't." The paper drew this remark: "Misspelled words definitely caught my eye." The rater's remark would seem to indicate that the paper has several spelling problems. But it has only two—"factoryes" and, in the first line, "woman" (rather than "women"), which the writer spells correctly on two later occasions. It would appear that in papers with so little text, any error seems blatant.

In fact, raters seldom find anything positive about such short papers. No one mentioned that the third sentence in the first paper coordinated infinitives for a sophisticated effect: "She tries to act like a boy, walk like a boy, talk like a boy." The only favorable remark was that the writer's voice comes through. And the lack of positive comments isn't surprising. With no content to consider—no details to savor, no examples to enjoy—the rater has little choice but to focus on errors.

A "2" Paper

Some obvious shortcomings—problems with organization, inadequate development, and grammatical errors—characterize "2" papers. As the following paper suggests, their greater length places "2" papers a notch above the "1's."

I think that men and women are treated equally to a certain extent. Women are expected to set at home, that was the attitude. But women are moving up in the world of work and men stay home and take care of the kids.

Women are treated differently because men think that women are weak and feeble. Today women can get training to do a "man's job."

One time me and my brother were out for the same job and he got it because they felt he could accomplish more than I could and the employers told me that to my face.

The are alot of "women jobs" that are being filled by men. I see nothing wrong with that but there is such a thing as prejudice.

My aunt is a salesperson at a fine company and there was a promotion coming up, of course she had competition, a man, they had the same experience but the man got it because women shouldn't have the authority to tell a man what to do. This isn't always the case at many jobs men and women are treated equal.

Analysis of Raters' Responses

Since the examples here need elaboration (What "women jobs" are being filled by men?) and the details lack specificity (What job did the brother and sister apply for? Where did the aunt work?), the paper remains vague. As one grader remarked, "Frequently I get hooked into wanting to read about what could be an excellent example, yet never are these examples specifically sketched so that I can see and understand the illustrations." Although raters also commented on the undeveloped examples and illustrations in a "3" paper, the details in a "2" paper are not only vague but sometimes inappropriate as well. The first sentence of the sample paper suggests that it will focus on equality—where or how the two sexes are treated equally, how women are moving up in the world. Instead, the paper goes on to show that women are treated differently: her brother got the job that she applied for, the promotion her aunt deserved went to a man. When we finish reading the paper, we are uncertain what point the writer wanted to make. Because inappropriate details are mixed in with a few appropriate ones, the paper lacks organization and fails to develop a central idea.

Not surprisingly, raters were distracted by numerous grammatical errors often typical of a "2" paper. One rater commented: "I found myself focusing on 'me and my brother,' 'alot,' and 'set' instead of 'sit,' and the lack of punctuation."

Basically, then, raters agreed upon the deficiencies that made the paper a "2"—lack of organization, skimpy and vague details, grammatical errors.

Upper-Range Papers

A "5" Paper

Who is Geraldine Ferraro. Is she (A) a "mouthy broad," (B) "a dumb blond," (C) "a political noose," or (D) a fellow human being who saw a need and tried to fill it? Chances are, most Americans, with the aid of the media, will answer anything but "d", depending upon how diplomatic they are.

Politics and women functions much like management and women. As long as she stays discretely in the trenches, in lower level management, or state and local politics, she's accepted. But higher ambitions are often viewed as frivolous, and serious efforts are ignored, simply because of one's sex.

When opportunities *are* made available, as they were to Ferraro, it's not always her qualifications which get her there. Whatever efforts or accomplishments Ferraro made in her public service became secondary to her New York and Rome connection. She was female, Catholic, and urban, running for office with a WASP from Minnesota. She may not have been the best person for the job, but she had the right connections. Thus, women, in their alleged ignorance, were expected to vote for a party because of a sexist consideration—not because of competence of the candidate.

Nearly every effort of the liberal Democrats to placate the female population and gain the vote was an insult to every woman's intelligence. It only reinforced the underlying sexism that plagues politics still today.

Analysis of Raters' Responses

This essay illustrates the promise as well as the problems of a "5" paper. On the one hand, it impressed its readers with a striking introduction and engaging examples. On the other hand, like many "5" essays, the paper struck teachers as very good but not quite excellent because it lacked one essential feature—full development.

No single feature of this essay received as much comment or praise as the introduction, formatted as a multiple choice quiz. One teacher praised it as "original in its method and well developed in its thought," while another noted "a dynamic opening, . . . an original beginning which immediately caught my attention." And the paper does, in fact, display a lively voice right from the beginning. The writer's use of slang, of chatty informal style, and of the quiz format promises a lively thought-provoking paper.

The raters also applauded the paper's strategies of development, especially the extended example. Each point of the paper revolves around Ferraro's selection as Mondale's running mate in the 1984 presidential election. And the extended example relates clearly to a subtle inductive argument, unveiled in the second paragraph, where the writer asserts that a person's sex is not as important in lower echelon positions in business and politics as in higher level, more public positions. The paper thus implicitly questions the hidden sexism of political campaign strategy as well as Ferraro's qualifications by stating, "Whatever efforts or accomplishments Ferraro made in her public service became secondary to her New York and Rome connection. She was female, Catholic, and urban, running for office with a WASP from Minnesota. She may not have been the best person for the job, but she had the right connections." The writer uses the Ferraro example finally

to substantiate the major assertion of the paper: "Nearly every effort of the liberal Democrats to placate the female population and gain the vote was an insult to every woman's intelligence." The paper's sophisticated development and careful logic impressed the raters. One praised the "attempt to show deep thought," another the decision to develop one, well-supported example.

Why then was an essay graced with a clever introduction and an extended illustration unanimously awarded a "5" rather than a "6"? The raters agreed on the matter: all four of them sought fuller development in the paper. They noted the paper's narrowness, its failure to "proceed to larger issues of equality," and its limit of "only one main supportive idea," even if the idea was "one which was developed fully." The paper's brevity clearly lost it points with the raters. One rater remarked that the paper could never be a "6" because in some places it needed to be more developed. Another assigned the "5" grade because it "might have had more substance had it been longer in length." Since none of the raters faulted the paper's other features, apparently lack of development and brevity alone influenced their decision.

The paper's originality and attention-getting introduction won it its "5." And certainly to win that "5," the essay needed to display the writer's struggle with significant, thought-provoking ideas, even if those ideas were not always substantiated through varied examples. What seems most apparent is that the typical "5" paper, if it sins at all, sins more from failed promise than anything else. The raters liked what they saw, but they wanted and expected more. The essay invites its readers to a tantalizing five course meal but sends them home too early—right after the Beef Wellington.

A "6" Paper

Two women are sitting in a restaurant having lunch. The restaurant is reasonably fashionable, and so are the women. Both are nice looking and married. During their lunch an unmarried friend of theirs walks in. Upon seeing him, the eldest lady comments "He's so distinguished looking for his age. He must be very happy living alone. You know what they say: once a bachelor, always a bachelor." A few minutes later, one of their single lady friends walks in. The discussion follows: "She looks worn out, if she doesn't find a man soon it will be too late. No one will want to marry an old spinster. It they do it will be out of pity." Clucking, and shaking their heads, they return to their meals.

This is an example of a normal lunch conversation that could go on between any two people in any place.

Men in women in America are treated differently. Men are allowed to make more choices in life, are given more responsibility. These choices can be in jobs, social life and even marriage. It seems that women have fewer choices in their life. On the job, men have a wider job scope. They can be anything they want; if they want to do "women's work" they are perceived as noble and helping out the "little woman". Women don't have these opportunities; they are almost forced into what are deemed as female careers. If a woman tries to break into a "mans field", she is called aggressive and pushy. Men are also hostile towards her.

After receiving a job, men and women aren't paid the same. It has been typical practice throughout history to pay men more for the same job a woman would get less pay for.

There is also greater opportunity for men to rise up in job levels. When a woman gets a job, she should be happy for it. She will probably stay at that level. Men can rise up more rapidly. They are said to have more control and are more businesslike than women.

As shown, just in the "work aspect" of life, men have more opportunities. This is just one part of life where the treatment of men and women is unbalanced. I shudder to think about the rest of lifes' opportunities and the outcome if this treatment isn't changed.

Analysis of Raters' Responses

Clearly, a paper doesn't have to be flawless to earn a "6" rating. This one, for instance, has misspelled words, a run-on sentence, and, at least according to one rater, "some choppy sentences." But it also has enough substance, structure, and style to allow the raters to overlook its infelicities.

To begin with, the essay is vivid and immediately engaging. It opens with an anecdote about two married women commenting on two unmarried people—first a man then a woman—who walk into a restaurant. The women consider the man distinguished looking and content in his bachelorhood ("He must be very happy living alone"), but they consider the woman worn out by her spinsterhood ("If she doesn't find a man soon it will be too late").

Raters are obviously moved by writers who successfully draw readers into their frame of reference and who project a personality. The raters consistently laud the paper's voice and its sense of audience. "This paper has a very lively voice," one rater said. "The writer captures the reader's attention from the very beginning," another commented.

"The writer involved the reader and never lost sight of her audience," a third noted. Obviously raters enjoyed this paper.

Aside from being engaging and enjoyable, the paper is organized and coherent. The writer moves smoothly from the opening anecdote to expository comments on how men and women are not only perceived differently but are treated differently—especially on the job, where men receive more pay and enjoy greater opportunity for advancement. In the exposition, as in the narrative, the contrast in opportunities for men and women is sustained. The writer notes that men who do "women's" work are seen as "noble and helping out the 'little woman.'" Women trying to make it in "men's" jobs are called "aggressive and pushy." The paper sticks to the topic and sustains a structural pattern.

Nonetheless, organization and voice and audience involvement alone do not explain what makes a paper a success. What comes out in the raters' comments is that the separate components of "6" papers are held together in an imaginative, pleasing balance. One rater noted, "all of her [the writer's] thoughts blend. . . ." Another mentioned how the paper "flows well," and the third wrote that the writer "ties the parts together well." The fourth rater perhaps summed it up well, noting the tension between freedom and formalism in this paper. "I particularly liked the balance between creativity and rigidity of form," he said.

If a "6" paper doesn't have to be perfect, its parts have to work together to create a whole greater than their sum. It sustains interest and readability because of its imagination, organization, and voice. And it motivates comments like "mature" or "sophisticated." It's like a heady wine with body and bouquet.

Conclusions

Several revealing patterns emerge from the raters' responses, patterns which suggest what high school teachers look for and reward when they evaluate essays.

First, the teachers reward length and development. The "4," "5," and "6" papers are much longer than the "1" and "2" papers, each only a single paragraph. The "3" paper, moreover, was judged "slightly" rather than "clearly" below average because it is "substantial" but still below average because of "paucity of material." Even more important than length is a paper's use of details and examples. In fact, the raters always noted a paper's dearth or richness of development: not one paper in the sample escaped scrutiny for that particular feature. The "5" paper, for instance, with an added example or two, would become a "6"; the "4" paper needs "more complete examples"; and the "3" paper's most

obvious problem is a failure to elaborate upon key assertions. Based on our sample, teachers value a paper's development more than any other single feature.

Raters also expect writers to stick to one topic. The "1," "2," and to some extent "3" papers suffer from problems with topic clarity. The "2" paper fails "to establish a focus," while the "3" paper exhibits irrelevancies. Each of the above-average papers succeeds, however, in establishing and maintaining a central thesis. Raters also tended to ignore basic problems in mechanics and grammar if the errors were offset by more positive traits. The "4" paper overcomes errors in tense with sophisticated diction, while clear organization and lively voice more than offset the "6" writer's misspelled words and run-on sentence. The paucity of material in the "1" and "2" papers, though, offers nothing to balance mistakes in agreement and spelling. Thus the errors appear more glaring.

Finally, certain facets of good writing remain elusive, almost ineffable. Readers often have difficulty, for instance, describing what first constitutes their interest in a piece of writing. How does a writer make first "contact" or engage us in such a way that we wish to read on? Clearly, something occurs early in a piece of writing—usually in the introduction—which catches our attention. Donald Murray once said that he choose novels by reading the first sentence twice. If the first sentence intrigues him, he will read the first paragraph. By the end of the first paragraph, he has decided if he will buy the book. In the same way, the vivid introductions of papers "5" and "6" impressed the raters. But what kept them interested beyond the engaging opening was control and voice. They like papers with sophisticated, mature sentences that indicate the writer has control over her language. And they like to hear the personality of the writer come through. Indeed, most of us reward control and voice in our students' writing, even if those features are difficult to define.

We do not underestimate how complicated it is to examine our individual evaluation procedures and how much more difficult it is to look at them in a group, where we have to expose our own ideas and rating methods to the scrutiny of our colleagues. Nor do we underestimate how difficult it is for university faculty and high school teachers to establish mutual grading standards. But how better to answer the teacher who writes as follows to the director of freshman English: "any material profiling your expectations in terms of high school preparation for college English coursework would help us accomplish the task of evaluating and updating our curriculum for college-bound students." If collaborative grading efforts lead us to better understand what it is we

do when we read and grade our students' papers, they may prove more effective than dutiful answers to questionnaires for producing consistency between high school and college writing programs.

Notes

¹Ron Fortune, ed., *School-College Collaborative Programs in English* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1986).

²We chose this particular question because 1)it seemed challenging to high school students but not overwhelmingly difficult; 2)it appeared not to discriminate against any group of students; 3)it achieved a middle level of abstraction, encouraging both broad generalizations and specific supporting details; and 4)it invited what is probably the most common form of high school writing—an explanatory essay. In short, the question was designed to stimulate students to do their best writing—given the restrictions of a 35-minute time limit and an unannounced topic.



Training Writing Teachers in a Small Program

David Foster

Like most small things, small writing programs don't get much notice. Big programs are generally seen as natural training grounds for graduate teachers of writing, since there are thousands of students for the pre- and post-tests, scores of classes available for experimental and control groups, and numbers pushing correlation figures well into the range of healthy significance. We generally assume that small programs have less interesting problems; when we notice them, it is to the extent that they replicate the strengths and weaknesses of larger programs.

Yet one major problem confronts faculty in any writing program, whatever its size: that of deciding how much freedom apprentice instructors should be given to plan, develop, teach and evaluate their own courses. Big programs tend toward centralization, while small programs may offer considerable latitude to participants and yet retain consistency. Yet the tension between freedom and constraint for apprentice teachers is present in all writing programs, though it can be particularly acute in large institutions. Michael Holzman writes about his discovery that even in the giant-sized program he administers, there was powerful resistance to his efforts to "control the quality of [the] teaching" (290). Many of his colleagues wanted "more latitude for the individual instructor, not less; less program-wide standardization of teaching techniques and goals, not more" (291). The dilemma he faced typifies the tension inherent in any writing program between instructors' desire for freedom and the program's need for structural consistency.

Structure, not size, is the crucial variable in weighing differences among writing programs. Holzman's compromise was to form clusters of "instructional groups" within the big program, to gain the individuality small-group participation allows. In another description of a large program's efforts to nurture teaching assistants, Maureen Potts and David Schwalm outline a "support system" featuring teaching assistants and a faculty mentor grouped in triads; the TAs' freedom increased gradually, accompanied by close supervision in planning and teaching. Both programs reflect an effort to approximate the values associated with small writing programs: personal freedom in planning and teach-

ing, mutual recognition of individual strengths and weaknesses, and the collegiality arising from close interaction of experienced and apprentice teachers.

I'd like to reverse the usual logic of our discipline: I'd like to argue that the ways in which a small program addresses the basic conflict between freedom and program centralization in training apprentice teachers can be relevant to all writing programs. The 4C's "Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing" asserts that English departments should "provide opportunities for the faculty to develop knowledge of theory and skill in the teaching of writing" (448). I'd like to suggest that the inherent advantages of small programs should be exploited even by much larger programs, because these values—freedom, individuality and collegiality—create for the apprentice teacher that "faculty" role which the Position Statement suggests as the basis for writing teachers' professional growth.

Our program is small, decentralized and flexible. The teaching fellows (there are five) organize their own syllabuses, guided only by a few departmental policies; they choose their own texts; and they devise their own assignments. Some might find this a dangerous arrangement. If there is no master syllabus how can inexperienced teachers, themselves still taking courses, develop effective plans for teaching writing? And if text adoptions are not orchestrated by experienced teachers, how can intelligent choices possibly be made? Can the benefits of giving inexperienced teachers freedom to make their own choices outweigh the costs?

The key to this question is the nature of the teaching fellows' role within the program. Our department's position is that with a clear set of goals for a freshman composition course, and a faculty willing to share its experience, a small group of apprentice teachers may be allowed wide freedom to plan, teach and evaluate the course. We believe that both students and apprentice teachers are best served by a structure emphasizing the teachers' freedom in all phases of the course.

The main purpose of our freshman writing course is to emphasize the writing process as it applies to a variety of purposes and audiences. The course policy, adhered to by regular faculty as well as teaching fellows, requires a certain total amount of writing and a range of expressive and expository writing tasks. Beyond these basic goals, there are no specific requirements as to the number or length of the course's writing tasks, the nature of classroom activities, the amount of reading, or other course elements. As they plan their syllabuses the fellows are guided and helped in several ways: by reference to the department's

"Policy Statement on English 1" printed helpfully on bright orange paper, by means of a planning workshop just before the beginning of the fall semester, and through continuous contact with the DFE. These measures are for guidance only, however, not for dictating methodology. The policy statement, for example, clarifies the basic requirements and then discusses some general goals for writing growth at the college level. The presemester workshop reviews a wide range of assignments and classroom strategies, both published and intradepartmental. After participating in this workshop the fellows complete a rough draft of their syllabuses, review them one by one during a group meeting of all fellows, then finalize them in conference with the DFE. All fellows will have taken—or will take in their first semester—the graduate course in teaching writing required for all doctoral candidates. Aside from a required minimum number of pages of writing and a general movement from expressive and personal to expository writing, the fellows are free to devise their own syllabus components, to pace writing and revisions as they judge best, and to formulate grading and attendance policies that they are comfortable with.

In their small universe three interacting forces govern the fellows' daily experience: contact with the DFE and with other regular faculty, their influence upon each other, and their contacts with students. Such methods are common enough in writing programs staffed by graduate students. But one characteristic of our small program is not likely to be found in bigger programs: an intimacy of relationship that confers collegial status upon the teaching fellows. For instance, in large programs the entire staff cannot convene around a round table; but if he convenes them in small groups, the DFE will not be able to make all meetings, obliging some groups to become self-sustaining. Even for graduate students, this is a difficult goal to maintain. Michael Holzman confesses that the study groups into which he had divided the instructors in his large program could not sustain themselves through the school year (291). In our small program the DFE convenes each meeting, with interested faculty often attending, and one of the fellows or faculty leading a discussion of a current topic in writing pedagogy. Faculty and fellows join the discussion as equals, aware that the situation derives its authenticity from the mutual interest of all participants. The fact that the fellows are required to attend represents the force of the system; the ambience of collegiality in the meetings encourages the fellows' sense of responsibility to the program and to themselves. There are disadvantages to this collegial approach. For one thing, the fellows' freedom to try strategies which seduce them sometimes leads to ineffective teaching. If the fellows were handed a carefully-worked-out syllabus, including proven assignments and classroom strategies developed by experi-

enced teachers, their students might be spared the blunders and excesses of apprentice teachers. For example, a teaching fellow whose late-paper policy is dictated by the cumulative wisdom of the department rather than by her own inexperienced judgment might avoid the situation of the fellow who changed her own policy halfway through the semester, thereby enraging several students who pursued her through the university appeals process. Such traumas will inevitably occur incidental to the teaching fellows' freedom to err.

Individual misjudgments are not the only disadvantage of a latitudinarian program. Because each fellow prepares her own syllabus, chooses her own text, and devises her assignments, students in different sections often perceive their experiences to have been quite different. One teaching fellow may believe that red-pen editing is the best way to respond to student writing, while another may follow the minimal-marking principle. Such differences draw exclamations of disbelief from the students exchanging opinions about their comp teachers: "Wow, she didn't mark all your spelling errors? My teacher zapped every mistake I made!" or, "You got a B on that paper? If I had turned that in with so many typos my teacher would've flunked it!" Such variability inevitably produces grist for student grievance-mills.

Faculty in other departments may also be sceptical of such latitude. When they discover students purportedly enrolled in the same course using different texts, assignments, and classroom methods, they are tempted to question the coherence of the course. In Biology 1 or Introductory US History there may be many different discussion sections and even different lecture sections, but chances are that the same schedules and texts will be used in all of them. How else, faculty in these disciplines would ask, can you give students' experience continuity except by binding together lectures, discussions and tests with the same schedules and texts? And faculty attitudes are crucial to the long-term impact of freshman composition: teachers in other disciplines will reinforce its lessons only if they perceive them to have been taught fully and coherently. But as Holzman points out, faculty attitudes can be changed through writing across-the-curriculum cooperation, which may be in the form of shared teaching, shared workshops, or simply ongoing discussions of common goals and methods concerning writing. But freedom for inexperienced teachers brings an inherent risk against which there is no ready protection.

The faculty of the writing program must decide whether the benefits of such freedom outweigh its cost. I think they do. For such is the eagerness of most apprentice teachers to learn from their experience, that not only in the long run will their freedom give them room for growth, but even in the short run—from one semester to the next—they

will seldom make the same mistake again, and so will improve from semester to semester with an alacrity that experienced teachers often cannot match. This eagerness stems from their being fully vested as teachers in the program. Participating in discussions about text choices familiarizes them with the cloned and conservative ways of textbooks. Constructing their own syllabuses after readings and discussions allows them a creator's freedom to inhabit their creation and know it from the inside. Deciding their own policy for responding to and evaluating student writing enables them to feel directly the impact of their decisions' successes and failures. Adjudicating their own absence and late-paper policy forces them to feel the power of student pressure directly, and to devise ways of dealing with it, rather than retreating behind the fence of departmental policy.

But their choices must be informed by the support systems of the program, and the responsibility must be reinforced by the systematic attention of the DFE and, again, cooperating faculty. How are these conditions to be met? In a small program close and continuous interaction occurs naturally, yet this interaction must be carefully organized if it is to be productive. Big programs cannot make themselves small, but all writing programs with an apprentice teacher component can capture something of the small-program ethos, by systematizing the freedoms granted to learning teachers. Here are some initiatives that can generate such relationships:

- *Allow apprentice teachers as much freedom in course planning as possible, especially including choosing texts and developing syllabuses. If texts must be centrally selected, bring the apprentice teachers into the selection process as fully as possible by appointing them to serve on selection committees and asking them to evaluate and report on texts. If a master syllabus must be constructed, make them part of the planning and allow as much freedom for devising local strategies as possible. If weekly assignments and deadlines must be pre-established, allow the teaching fellows to form their own daily plans; permit them to experiment with different kinds of classroom interaction, different ways of responding to student writing, different sequences of assignments, different levels of reading-writing combinations. Program administrators may want to insist that every syllabus has some mix of classroom and one-on-one contact, but they should allow fellows to schedule this mix as they see fit. Some institutions require all officially scheduled time to be in the form of classroom contact, but this kind of inflexibility will prevent apprentice teachers from experiencing the impact of different settings upon their teaching and their students' learning.*

- *Establish working groups of apprentice teachers (no more than half a dozen) to meet regularly with fulltime faculty, not just for routine staffing matters, but for discussion of important current issues in writing pedagogy.* These issues need not follow any particular sequence; indeed, group members should be encouraged to read current journals for issues of interest. These groups should be guided by at least one and preferably more experienced writing teachers from the regular faculty, particularly if there are too many groups for the DFE to be fully involved in. Each member of the group (including faculty members) should have responsibility for planning a session, and regular attendance should be regarded as a commitment. Creating commitment is not easy. For the graduate teachers academic credit for the semester's meetings is one way of doing it, justified by a research paper resulting from the required presentation. But the strongest force for group integrity is the bond that will form among group members, particularly when the apprentice members begin to share in the excitement of discussing major issues affecting their daily work. Attending staff meetings for routine discussions of policy and procedure is a grim enough prospect to discourage even the most eager apprentice teacher; but a working group in which each participant's contribution adds to the impact of the meeting will offer strong motivation.
- *Establish a mentor system wherein each apprentice teacher meets with, visits and is visited by, and exchanges batches of student writing with an experienced writing teacher other than the DFE.* The mentor relationship described by Potts and Schwalm is an excellent model of this aspect of apprentice-master collegiality. Ask both members of the mentor relationship for a summary of activity and insight at semester's end. Experience in diversity cannot be gained nearly as well from a course taught by one teacher or from the omnipresent DFE; a series of mentor relationships offers an apprentice education in its traditional sense.
- *Find small ways to help apprentice teachers see themselves as part of a community of professionals.* Appoint them to committees, particularly committees responsible for overseeing the composition program and the graduate program; encourage them to attend department meetings; put them on the published departmental roster with regular faculty; get them into the institutional phone book under the faculty heading; give them nameplates for their offices and building keys for access to mailroom and offices; allow them faculty library and copying privileges insofar as the departmental budget can tolerate it; introduce them to regular faculty in hallways and lounges, eat lunch with them, invite them to faculty

parties. Gratuitous or trivial as these minutiae appear, they count, because they add vital specificity to the professionalization of apprentice teachers in the composition program.

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Creating the Profession: The GAT Training Program at the University of Arizona

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Writing program administrators who prepare and implement training courses for graduate students newly assigned to teach composition must wrestle with a difficult rhetorical problem: They must think of the audience for the course not only as individuals, with varied backgrounds and degrees of commitment, but also in terms of their department's institutional goals and attitudes. A traditional departmental view holds that graduate students are hired hands, duespayers on the lowest rung of the university ladder. It then makes perfect sense that when the department must offer service courses, the services will be provided by the academic equivalent of truck stop waitresses. This view reinforces the image of graduate students as cheap, untrained labor with little chance and less inclination to do their work well. Graduate students teaching composition sling literacy like hash, and their customers, freshmen without the good sense or past advantages to earn AP credit or otherwise bypass the composition requirement, deserve no better. Year after year program administrators gather the ingredients—texts, syllabi, standards—and the help cooks up the same old slop and calls it a curriculum.

A contemporary, and we think a more humane and ultimately more constructive, view of graduate student teachers assumes that all composition instructors become members of a legitimate academic discipline the moment they are hired to teach. Accordingly, at the University of Arizona we attempt to welcome Graduate Assistants in Teaching (GATs) as junior colleagues. Training courses offered to these new professionals should showcase the strengths of the profession in the form of the best available scholarship, old and new, while admitting that questions remain about how best to teach writing. These questions pose the challenges that occupy the current generation of writing specialists and that will draw young people into the field. To hold this view, we first must believe that we belong to a worthy profession, however disdained the teaching of writing may be by tradition. Further, since the future of

literacy may depend on the teachers, scholars, and researchers who will replace us, we have the responsibility of shaping the profession as we perform what seem to be routine administrative duties.

Thus we must abandon a basic skills approach to training graduate students to teach, just as we must refuse to accept that freshmen deserve only instruction in the most basic skills of writing. We must empower graduate students by giving them access to rhetorical control in the classroom, a control born of a mastery of the elements of the teaching situation. We must train them to respond nimbly and confidently to the various problems writing teachers face in the performance of their duties and allow them to feel that the choices they make have consequences for their students and the society in which we all live. Professionalism involves accepting responsibility for one's actions, and if we want responsible adults representing us in our departments' composition classrooms, we must define and foster this comprehensive and flattering view of our common goal.

Pursuing this goal of empowerment is particularly important in programs as large as the one in Arizona. According to statistics offered by Joseph Gibaldi and James V. Mirollo in an MLA study, the largest Ph.D.-granting institution in 1979 employed 142 GATs, and only ten departments had more than 100 GATs (1). Our program this fall has over 100 GATs, 30 of whom are in their first year of teaching writing. Of these 30, fewer than one-third have any previous teaching experience. And like 75% of the programs described in the MLA study, our program immediately places these first-year graduate students in the classroom. Well over 90% of our freshman level writing courses are staffed by GATs, and over 50% of the sections of English 101, the course in expository writing that most incoming students take, are staffed by first-year GATs. To keep English 101 classrooms from becoming a composition ghetto shared by the least experienced students and least prepared teachers, new GATs must be given both a sense of mission and the methodology that will allow them to teach successfully. They must believe in what they're doing; they must trust the people who are training them to do it.

The following description of features of our program illustrates several ways we have tried to foster a sense of shared purpose and collegiality at Arizona.

Revising the Guide: The Program's Voice

A Student's Guide to Freshman Composition is a required text in all English 101 and 102 classes at the University of Arizona. As such, it functions as common doctrine for GATs. The Guide contains program policies that all GATs must enforce and procedures that all GATs must follow. It also

contains superior freshmen essays, the winners of an annual contest, a three-page description of grading standards, and sample graded essays that provide concrete examples of how the program expects student writing to be evaluated. In the first several editions of the *Guide*, the supervisory staff of the Composition Program graded the sample essays, even though their students had not written them. It seemed obvious that the most experienced teachers could do the best job of evaluating student writing. After all, the supervisors had read and evaluated thousands of essays from scores of sections. This original editorial policy led to grading guided by the criteria set out in the "Grading" portion of the *Guide*. Essays were seen in terms of content, organization, expression, and mechanics and usage. These hardy categories are certainly useful for objective discussions of finished essays, but student essays are notorious for being unfinished and in need of the subjective though reasoned intervention of a concerned teacher. As experienced as the supervisors were, they had no personal knowledge of the particular essays put forward as models each year. Only the GATs could respond fully to these essays, for they had overseen their creation in the classroom.

Thus, the four most recent editions of the *Guide* have featured student essays accompanied by comments written by GATs; these comments evaluate not only the finished product offered for a grade, but also the early generative writing and drafts that led to the final product (these are also printed, as part of the student writer's overall process). This new policy serves several ends. First, students and new GATs alike are provided valuable insight into the writing processes necessary to the successful completion of assignments given in freshman composition. Second, freshmen are introduced to the kind of responses they will receive from their instructors and to the role of GATs in the program. Indeed, in some cases the students' instructor is the writer of the published comments; this helps the students see the person in front of the room as a teacher, a writer, and an established member of the department, which undermines the usual criticism that the instructor should not be respected because he or she is "just a TA." Third, and most important for this article, GATs learn that their contributions to the Program are valued and respected. Their students' essays are no longer wrenched away from them and judged by unforgiving standards in the Valhalla of faculty offices. If their students appear in the pages of the required text, they appear too, to describe and celebrate their successful interaction with their students' writing. GATs who work on the *Guide* join the Program's teaching community in a concrete and publicly acknowledged manner, and their names appear with their comments as evidence of their membership in the profession.

This policy, which aims at treating new teachers as responsible professionals, does result in several administrative problems. GATs whose comments are not solicited for the *Guide* may feel that they are being placed lower in the program hierarchy than those who are asked to write for the publication. Participating GATs may be perceived as slavish or obsequious by those GATs who hold an us-vs.-them view of the training program. The editors of the *Guide* know from experience, however, that the GATs have a personal stake in the publication of their comments, and that they often resent the revisions the editors suggest, seeing those changes as concessions to a standard at the expense of their students and their own views of the essay. In the end, though, these tensions are healthy for the program, because they force both supervisor and GAT to accept that standards are constantly revised and negotiated by the professional community.

The Mirror in the Classroom

Gene Krupa argues that for GAT training programs to be effective they should be “book, model, and mirror” (442). That is, as book, a program should equip new teachers with the profession’s published knowledge about how writers write and how teachers teach writing. As model, it should show—preferably in workshops—how to teach writing. Finally, as mirror, it should encourage new teachers to examine their own teaching. At the University of Arizona we have tried to clean the mirror so that GATs see an accurate reflection of their teaching.

A supervisor visits each GAT’s classes two or three times during the semester. Most GATs view these visits as tests of their ability. Inexperienced teachers, particularly, fear that their weaknesses will be harshly spotlighted by the supervisor in a white glare of criticism. However, as Peter Elbow points out in “Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process,” effective teaching involves playing dual roles. Although GATs may expect a punitive judge to visit their classrooms, we endeavor to send a nurturing coach, a guide, to mirror the GAT’s progress as a teacher. If we intervene in the GAT’s process of learning to teach, just as Maxine Hairston says we should intervene in our students’ process of learning to write, we must take into account the stage of development the GAT has reached. Thus, the process approach to training teachers does not expect perfection immediately; rather, the supervisor attempts to show the GAT how his or her teaching persona and strategies affect students. As Krupa states, “New teachers need to have their teaching reflected because of the difficulty of observing a process while participating in it” (443).

To make class visits into supportive, mirroring visits rather than authoritarian, judgmental visits, supervisors have used several strate-

gies. First, some supervisors have invited GATs to visit and critique the supervisor’s lessons. That practice communicates to the GAT that the supervisor is willing to accept constructive mirroring as well as offer it. The supervisor is willing to make a transaction. Second, some supervisors encourage GATs to determine not only the time but also the purpose of class visits. That is, the GAT will say to the supervisor: “I’d like you to visit my class next Friday because I’m holding a discussion on refuting opposition objections. I’d like you to tell me how well things go. I guess I’d also like you to suggest ways for me to improve my skills at leading a large group discussion. Maybe you could pay particular attention to the types of questions I ask.” Following that class visit, the supervisor will probably ask the GAT to assess his or her own teaching performance. The supervisor’s recommendations—and commendations—usually grow out of that self-assessment. In such a transaction, the GAT has much control.

One objection to giving the GAT such control over the supervisor’s evaluation is that the conniving GAT may only perform well when expecting observation; at other times, the GAT may slack off. Student evaluations at the end of the semester will reveal such poseurs, and the benefits of establishing mutual goals shared by supervisors and GATs make this approach worthwhile. The GAT is offered not only guidance but also responsibility for improving as a teacher. Supervisors write formal evaluations of GATs with this goal of mutual responsibility in mind. The top half of the standard GAT evaluation forms for both class visits and paper grading solicit objective descriptions of the GAT’s methods. Supervisors try to reflect exactly what happened in the classroom and exactly what messages are being sent by the GAT’s comments on student essays before beginning to evaluate the effectiveness of the GAT’s lesson plan or approach to grading essays. Then, on the bottom half of the evaluation, supervisors point out strengths and weaknesses and offer specific suggestions aimed at sharpening the skills and expanding the techniques available to new writing instructors. Thus the evaluation forms serve primarily pedagogical purposes rather than judgmental purposes. This approach sometimes makes it difficult to rank GATs, as there are no quantitative measures involved, no numbers, no mean level of performance. Individuals teach and progress as individuals, and the training course cannot be flunked unless a GAT flatly refuses to behave responsibly.

Cells of the Organism: Supervisory Small Groups

In addition to working with GATs individually, each supervisor also works with a small group consisting of five GATs. It is in small group meetings that some of the most important and difficult work of learning

how to teach is done. Perhaps the biggest challenge for most supervisors is coordinating five people with different objectives and teaching styles into a workable group. The actual small group meetings are usually informal, and once the official business is discussed the session is given over to questions, problems, commiseration and, occasionally, back-patting. A small group is generally a comfortable arena for exchanging and assessing the effectiveness of techniques and approaches, and comparing assignments and essay exam questions. Many supervisors solicit and use suggestions from the students to set the agenda, thus addressing specific problems rather than following a doctrinaire syllabus. For instance, in small group sessions devoted to how to respond to student essays, GATs are asked to choose an essay written in one of their sections to supplement the sample essays provided by the *Student's Guide*. These essays are reproduced and distributed to other small group members, and thus the group as a whole determines the agenda for the meeting. The chosen essays illustrate particular problems each GAT wants to discuss in a friendly setting among peers.

Another effective method in a small group is to leave the discussion open and the topics broadly defined: This portion of the training is as individualized as possible and is the main support system for the GATs. Questions and discussion are simply more spontaneous than in large meetings, and so all questions get asked rather than just those of general interest. As we all know, the trivial questions often spark solutions to more important problems. As in any teaching situation, some problems are particular to individual GATs while others seem to plague a majority of new composition teachers. Recently, for example, one supervisor noticed that several of his own GATs were having difficulty developing classroom discussions. Of course, he worked with those individuals immediately to help them perceive the process of developing a classroom discussion as analogous to developing an essay. To extend this analogy, one needs to perceive discussion questions as devices for soliciting assertions and support for those assertions. The process can be either deductive (general assertions followed by supporting specifics) or inductive (specific details leading to or followed by general assertions).

After helping those individual GATs to understand one possible method for developing a classroom discussion, he surveyed other members of the small group to determine what strategies they employed for structuring discussions. The survey indicated that those GATs also needed some explicit (not tacit) model to help them structure discussions. In the small group setting the supervisor and the two GATs who had received the individual guidance teamed to work with other members of the small group. That supervisor subsequently polled the

other supervisors and discovered that many GATs needed help with structuring discussions. As a result part of the next large group meeting was devoted to the orchestration of classroom discussions. This example typifies the interplay of concerns across various segments of the training program: small group sessions, large group discussions and lectures, and the individual relationships between supervisors and GATs.

Making Statements in the Professional World

Within the fields of rhetoric and composition some well-known scholars have collaborated on books, articles, and conference papers. Among the more familiar teams are Cooper and Odell, Tate and Corbett, Flower and Hayes, Knoblauch and Brannon, Fulwiler and Young, Witte and Faigley, Daly and Miller, and Lunsford and Ede. (The last team has even written about such efforts.) While such collaborative work is not uncommon in composition, it is usually the case, as with those people just mentioned, that both partners are tenure-track or tenured faculty. It is far less common to see this sort of scholarly collaboration between a faculty member and a graduate student. Too often, faculty exploit graduate students in research and publication by assigning them to the drudgery of research without inviting them to share in the rewards of such scholarship. We believe that such exploitation is immoral. It cheats graduate students out of the learning and the self-esteem that come from actively contributing to the profession, and it cheats the profession out of contributions that graduate students have to offer.

In terms of pedagogy, particularly, even the least experienced GAT has statements to make about the process of teaching writing. New eyes see new connections and can contribute to the profession accordingly. Too many senior administrators and scholars no longer teach the basic courses they're entitled, by experience and status, to make pronouncements about. Through collaboration, we can combine theory and practice to better serve ourselves and our students.

To make certain that our GATs become fully responsible professionals, some of our composition faculty have collaborated with them in research and publication. These efforts have resulted in co-authored articles in journals such as *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *The Writing Instructor*, *Journal of Teaching Writing*, *Journal of Business Communication*, and *Arizona English Bulletin*. Other co-authored manuscripts are currently being considered by journal editors and review boards. At other times faculty members have acted more as coaches and cheerleaders, as well as preliminary readers, to GATs who have been sole authors of journal articles in *Indiana English* and *Arizona English Bulletin*, as well as chapters in several of NCTE's annual Classroom Practices books.

Our GATs and composition faculty have also collaborated on papers delivered at conferences by the Arizona English Teachers Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the Association of Business Communication. And, again, faculty simply coached and cheered as some GATs wrote and delivered their own conference papers.

By far the most ambitious GAT/faculty collaborative effort to date is a book-length manuscript on writing across the curriculum. In that project faculty and GATs are co-authoring some of the twenty-one chapters, and other GATs are writing their own chapters. Further, a GAT and a faculty member are co-editing the book, which is currently being considered for publication.

Conclusion: Speaking With One Voice

Through a series of colloquia, GATs at the University of Arizona are introduced to the ideas of major figures in the fields of rhetoric and composition. In recent years, speakers including Andrea Lunsford, James Kinneavy, Daniel Fader, William Irmscher, Susan Miller, Gene Piché, and Frederick Crews have spoken to the assembled GATs about their theories and related teaching techniques. These people stand as role models for people just entering the profession; they represent the potential for achievement in scholarship and teaching that is open to writing specialists, rhetoricians and composition specialists alike. These colloquia, which are often keyed to selected readings in the field, comprise the conventional academic component of the training program.

The training course at the University of Arizona is required of first-year GATs; all GATs must attend all large group meetings and lectures, and they must participate in small group activities and work with a supervisor. Up to four units of academic credit for the training course can be earned during the first year of teaching, although GATs are not required to sign up for these units. (This option illustrates that old ways die hard; some degree programs will not accept teacher training/methods courses as a legitimate part of a graduate student's professional preparation; students who choose to sign up for such credits are slumming and will not be rewarded by the faculty in their major field.) Ultimately, then, each GAT must decide whether to be satisfied with basic skills teaching literacy or to strive for a standard of professionalism not commensurate with the salary and status awarded them and the people supervising them. It is up to teacher trainers and writing program administrators to persuade GATs that they are valued, whatever the attitude of the greater academic community consisting of students,

faculty, and university administrators. Our ethical appeal, establishing our knowledge of the field, our integrity and goodwill, and our emotional appeal, which attempts to instill professional pride in our new colleagues, must leaven the logical appeals that have dominated our approach to training graduate students up to now. Logic tells us that a low status job is a low skills job, which ignores the overwhelming complexity of teaching writing well. Logic tells us that inexperienced teachers need rigid guidelines within which to function effectively, which ignores that most new GATs are experienced writers with rich backgrounds solving the rhetorical problems their students will face. Finally, and hardest to admit, logic tells us to ignore the political and economic contexts in which GATs teach because we have to some degree escaped the condition that they are just entering, and we have an interest in protecting our positions at their expense. If we obey the logic that tells us to preserve the status quo because it is expedient to do so, then we have no right to presume to teach others the noble art of teaching.

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The Basic Writing Course at Eastern Illinois University: An Evaluation of Its Effectiveness

Frank McCormick and Chris McCormick¹

When we undertook to evaluate Eastern Illinois University's basic writing course English 1000 two years ago, we did so with some trepidation. What we hoped our evaluation would reveal was that the course had succeeded in its purpose of giving underprepared writers (defined by the English department for placement purposes as students having ACT English scores of 12 or lower) an opportunity to bring their skills to a level sufficient to allow them to exit from the course on a first or second try, and then go on to pass the two regular writing courses required of all our freshmen, and eventually earn a college degree.² That was our hope. What we feared was one of two considerably less felicitous outcomes. We feared, on the one hand, that we would find English 1000's exit requirements to have been insufficiently rigorous to prepare our basic writers for the demands of the two all-university freshman writing courses which awaited them, with the result that English 1000 alumni routinely failed their subsequent freshman writing courses and in the process, as Geoffrey Wagner and other opponents of developmental courses had cautioned, lowered the level at which instruction could proceed in the required freshman writing courses designed for our better prepared writers.

Or had our exit criteria for English 1000, and our failure rate of 40%, been too rigorous? In our alternative nightmare we imagined ourselves discovering that instead of offering underprepared writers an opportunity eventually to succeed in our college-level freshman writing courses, English 1000 effectually barred enrollees from entering our all-university freshman writing courses at all, and thus denied students who had had the misfortune of earning ACT English scores of 12 or lower a reasonable opportunity of earning a college degree.

Happily, the evaluation revealed our worst-case scenario to have been excessively gloomy. Indeed our findings are consistent with those of Ferrin, Pedrini, Brown and Ervin, and Presley in suggesting that in this specific instance a developmental course has been moderately successful in achieving its aim of giving underprepared students a fighting chance of succeeding in freshman English and beyond. As for

the question of "lowering," we suspect the situation at our institution is not much different from that at most other institutions in which composition courses are taught by regular, full-time, autonomous staff members, including the chairman and full professors. The presence of underprepared writers in college composition courses necessarily lowers the level at which instruction can proceed in classes taught by instructors who are responsive to the needs of their underprepared writers. In classes taught by instructors who are indifferent to the needs of such writers their presence has no lowering effect at all. We offer a sampling of our findings in the pages that follow.

First a description of our research design. We compared the academic performance of a group of 196 students having ACT English scores of 11 and 12 (scores which obliged the students to enroll in our basic writing course English 1000) to a group of 239 similarly prepared students having ACT scores of 13 and 14 (scores sufficiently high to exempt them from English 1000). Our sample of 435 students comprised all of Eastern Illinois University's freshmen reporting ACT English scores of 11 through 14 during the semesters of Spring '77 through Fall '78. For each of them we collected and used SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) programs to analyze information which included the following: composite ACT score, grades in English 1001 and 1002, cumulative GPA, total number of credit hours accumulated, probation/dismissal record and graduation or non-graduation.³

We begin with the less encouraging news. We found no significant difference in either the average total credit hours earned by the two groups or in the groups' graduation rates (42.2% for the 11s and 12s vs. 46.8% for the 13s and 14s). Indeed for our 11s and 12s (i.e., those who had been required to take English 1000) were significantly more likely to be placed on academic probation and eventually dismissed from the university for low scholarship than were the 13s and 14s (22% vs. 14%). We also found that the 11s and 12s in our sample had significantly lower GPAs than did the 13s and 14s (\bar{x} = 2.18 vs. 2.40 on a 4-point scale). That is to say, we found, not very surprisingly, that students with lower ACT English scores did not do so well in college as did those with higher ACT English scores.

Nor were we particularly surprised to discover that for the 11-14s in our sample higher ACT Composite scores were significantly and positively correlated with higher grades in English 1001 and 1002, higher GPAs, and higher average total credit hours. (Here and elsewhere in this report, when we use the term "significantly" we mean statistically significant at the .05 level.) What did rather surprise us was our discovery that ACT Composite scores were better predictors of performance in our all-university freshman composition courses than were ACT

English scores (though ACT English scores did prove to be effective predictors of performance in the all-university Speech 1310 course). In short, we found that the higher the ACT scores the better the student's chances of succeeding at Eastern Illinois University.

But if English 1000 offered no simple and cheap remedy for all of the ills associated with low ACT scores, we did find evidence to suggest that the experience of taking the basic writing course proved beneficial to our students when they later took their all-university freshman composition courses English 1001 and 1002. To be sure, the English 1000 alumni (the 11s and 12s) did *not* earn significantly higher grades in English 1001 and 1002 than did the students in our sample (the 13s and 14s) who had not taken the basic writing course. But the grades of the two groups were very similar. The 13s and 14s earned slightly higher grades in 1001 than did the 11s and 12s (\bar{x} = 1.92 for the 13s and 14s vs. 1.88 for the 11s and 12s). On the other hand, our 11s and 12s earned slightly higher grades in 1002 (\bar{x} = 2.20) than did the 13s and 14s (\bar{x} = 2.10).

But the similarities in average 1001 and 1002 grades for the two groups do not adequately testify to the benefits which the English 1000 experienced offered its alumni. What we found most encouraging was the discovery that *the students in our sample who had taken English 1000 were significantly more likely to pass English 1001 on the first try than were those who had not taken English 1000. What is more, the 12s who remained in English 1000 for the entirety of the semester were significantly more likely to pass English 1001 on the first try than the 12s who were excused from taking English 1000 after passing an essay-writing proficiency examination in the first week of the semester.* We can now answer in the affirmative the most basic of the questions we posed for ourselves: our evidence strongly suggests that the taking of our basic writing course does indeed improve an underprepared writer's chances of surviving Eastern Illinois University's regular freshman composition courses.

Who passes and who fails the basic writing course? Eighty percent of the 11s and 12s in our sample passed English 1000 on the first try. Those who did so had significantly higher ACT Composite scores than did those who failed on the first try. Moreover, those who passed on the first try were significantly more likely to graduate than were those who failed in the first attempt (47% vs. 16%). The prognosis for those who fail the course is not good. Only 33% of those who failed the course once passed it on a second try. *None* of the seven students who failed English 1000 twice ever passed the course.

Our evidence suggests that class attendance is related to success or failure in English 1000. In an investigation of attendance patterns conducted two years ago, our graduate assistant Jennifer Donnelly discovered that persons who attended their English 1000 class regularly

were more likely to pass the course than were persons who did not attend regularly—this despite the fact that attendance was not considered in determining the final grade for the course. Donnelly noted, for instance, that *all* of the thirteen students who had perfect attendance in Fall '82 passed the course. Conversely, and again with very few exceptions, she discovered that students who did *not* attend regularly failed the course.

In speaking of class attendance we speak of one aspect of student behavior which common sense tells us is pertinent to academic performance, and in some way indicative of the degree of our students' motivation to learn. All of us who have taught or supervised a basic writing course know that some basic writers are more highly motivated, and consequently more likely to be successful than others. But can such students be identified beforehand? The response of the students in our sample to item #20 of the "Special Educational Needs" section of the ACT Assessment was enlightening. Item #20 reads as follows: "I need help in expressing my ideas in writing." Students who answered "yes" to the item earned significantly higher GPAs and average total credit hours than did persons who left the answer blank.

Some Conclusions

On the basis of our investigation we would hazard the following generalizations about the academic performance of basic writers in our own program:

1. The single most clearly discernible difference between the *behavior* of students who pass and that of students who do not pass the basic writing course is that the former attend class regularly whereas the latter do not.
2. Basic writers with higher ACT Composite scores have a better chance of succeeding in freshman English and beyond than do basic writers with lower ACT Composite scores.
3. Students who fail the basic writing course twice are not at all likely to pass the course in additional attempts. Certainly none of the students in our sample succeeded in doing so.
4. If the prognosis for those who fail the basic writing course is poor, the benefits for those who do pass—60% of all our enrollees, and 87% of the 11s and 12s in our study—are real and measurable. The English 1000 alumni in our sample (the 11s and 12s) required significantly fewer tries to pass English 1001 than did the students who did not take English 1000 (the 13s and 14s).

5. Finally, basic writers who answer "yes" to the statement, "I need help in expressing my ideas in writing" are more likely to succeed in college than are basic writers who answer "no" or who leave the answer blank (item #20) in the "Special Educational Needs" section of the ACT Assessment). We suggest this finding is potentially useful to admissions officers and writing program administrators seeking to identify underprepared students who are likely to prove good academic risks.

Notes

¹We are indebted to Jim Quivey for encouraging us in this investigation and for suggesting that we examine the performance of students having ACT English scores of 11 through 14. To Bill McGown we are grateful for performing much of the statistical analysis on which our report is based. Thanks also to Tony Schaeffer, Shirley Karraker, Jerry McAnulty, and Jennifer Donnelly.

²English 1000, which is taught by English department graduate assistants working under the close supervision of the Director of Composition, is a non-credit course in basic writing which students with ACT English scores of 12 and below must pass before enrolling in the first of the university's two required composition courses, English 1001. To pass the course students must write two final essays which are judged acceptable by the Composition Committee (full-time faculty who regularly teach English 1001). Students who write acceptable essays in the first week of the semester are placed immediately in sections of 1001.

³Our data were analyzed using the following statistical tests: (1) a *t-test*—to compare for significant differences the means of two groups; (2) the *Pearson product-moment correlation*—to indicate the degree of relationship between two sets of paired numbers; and a (3) *chi-square test*—to indicate the degree of relationship between two frequency data variables.

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Announcements

The National Testing Network in Writing

The National Testing Network in Writing, The New Jersey Department of Higher Education, and the City University of New York announce the FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON WRITING ASSESSMENT on April 5, 6, and 7 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This national conference is for educators, administrators, and assessment personnel and will be devoted to critical issues in assessing writing in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary settings. Discussion topics will include theories and models of writing assessment, assessing writing across the curriculum, the impact of testing on minority and ESL students, computer applications in writing assessment, and current research on writing assessment.

For information and registration, please write Dr. Mary Ellen Byrne, New Jersey Department of Higher Education, 224 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08625 or call her at (609) 987-1962.

The Journal of Advanced Composition

Beginning with Volume 7, the *JOURNAL OF ADVANCED COMPOSITION* will undergo a change in leadership. Sponsored by the University of South Florida and the University of Utah, the journal will be edited by Gary A. Olson. All future submissions and correspondences should be sent to:

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University of South Florida
Tampa, FL 33620

JAC—an annual, approximately 250 page publication—will maintain its high standards. All submitted manuscripts will be vigorously reviewed by members of our Editorial Board and appropriate outside readers. Authors submitting an article after March 20, 1987, will be informed of the article's acceptance or rejection within 2 months of the date of submission.

Subscription Information

Contact: Professor Karen Spear
Department of English
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Institution: \$12.50 per year

Personal: \$10.00 per year (\$25.00 for 3 years)

Editorial Policy

JAC provides a forum for scholars working within the general field of advanced composition, including advanced expository, business, creative, and technical writing as well as writing across the curriculum.

JAC accepts articles on theory, research, and pedagogy directly relevant to teachers and scholars of advanced composition. The editor is especially interested in empirical studies and theoretical discussions examining cognition, rhetoric, readability, style, and the connections between contemporary criticism and rhetorical analysis.

JAC does not accept articles describing classroom techniques unless the author clearly demonstrates how such practices derive from current theory and research and how they can be applied to the advanced composition classroom in general.

Submissions

When submitting articles for publication, please,

- submit one original and two copies
- print your name and affiliation only on a cover sheet, not on the articles
- enclose sufficient return postage clipped, not pasted, to a pre-addressed envelope.

Call for Papers

WPA Summer Conference

The Council for Writing Program Administrators will sponsor its annual conference August 5-7, 1987, on the campus of Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Sessions at this conference will consist of workshops, papers, and informal discussions or panels on topics pertinent to the administration of writing programs: establishing and sustaining a cohesive program, staffing, budgeting, training teachers, testing and evaluating students, working with other administrators, running a computer lab or a writing center, and so on.

The Council invites contributions to the conference program. Those who would like to participate should submit a proposal by March 1, 1987. The general theme of the conference will be "Establishing Our Identity as WPAs," but the program chair will consider any proposals of interest to writing program administrators. Please keep in mind that your audience is likely to consist of college faculty and personnel actively involved in the administration of writing programs and therefore you should keep an administrative focus to your proposal.

Each proposal must include

- a title and brief description indicating the purpose of the presentation (suitable for publishing in the conference program)
- a complete description of the presentation as you will give it or an abstract of not more than 500 words
- a list of audio-visual equipment you will need
- your name, address, and phone number(s)

Please submit your proposal to

Conference on Writing Program Administration
Christine A. Hult, Program Chair
UMC 3200
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322



Membership in the Council of Writing Program Administrators

Membership in the Council of Writing Program Administrators includes a subscription to *WPA*. The membership fee is \$20 a year in the United States and \$21.50 a year in other countries.*

To apply for membership, please fill out this form and return it with a check or money order payable to the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Send the form and fee to Arthur Dixon, Secretary-Treasurer, WPA J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA 23241

Date _____

Name _____

Title _____

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Address _____

Amount enclosed _____ \$20 _____ \$21.50

*Members who join during the period September 1 through January 15 will receive the fall, winter, and spring issues of the current year's volume. Members who join from January 15 through September 1 will receive the last issue of the current year (spring) and the first two issues of the next volume (fall and winter).

Change or revision of name and address. If the name or address printed on your *WPA* mailing labels is incorrect or has changed, please print the complete, correct information below and send it to Arthur Dixon, Secretary-Treasurer, WPA J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA 23241.

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