


**WRITING INSTRUCTION
FOR VERBALLY
TALENTED YOUTH**

The Johns Hopkins Model

**Ben Reynolds
Kendra Kopelke
William G. Durden**



AN ASPEN PUBLICATION



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Preface

Since the Johns Hopkins Writing Skills classes for talented youth began, teachers—not only of gifted classes, but also of regular classes in high school and college—have asked us, “How do you teach writing?” This book, by writers who teach in the Writing Skills program, is a partial response to that question.

One need not be a writer to use this book. Though one strength of the Hopkins Writing Skills program is that its teachers are writers, many excellent writing instructors have not written professionally. However, whether teaching gifted or regular classes, in high school or in college, concern for writing is essential. Also essential is a class or class time designed explicitly to teach writing. We distinguish between an English class, which incorporates written assignments into the interpretation of literature, and a writing class.

The methods and exercises presented here were developed, tested, and modified in classes of eighth and ninth graders selected for their demonstration of college-level writing ability. Experience has shown that these methods also work well for students in regular high school and college classes. Included here are the classroom exercises we have found to be most successful, with a step-by-step explanation of what each should accomplish and how. A distinguishing feature of this book is that each chapter usually treats a complete class meeting, making this a valuable sourcebook for writing teachers.

Each chapter is divided into four major sections:

1. classroom objectives
2. an overview for the teacher
3. an actual classroom exercise
4. possible assignments.

The overview labeled “For the Teacher” summarizes the exercise, its rationale, and its aims. This brief review allows the teacher to apply any chapter immediately.

DESCRIPTION OF CHAPTERS

This book is organized step-by-step—from preparing to write, through writing, to rewriting—an order those less experienced at teaching writing will find useful. Any chapter can be applied immediately to an actual teaching situation, but new teachers should first read the book entirely. Because the composing process is global rather than linear, the chapters are cross-referenced; familiarity with these interconnections will enhance your role as teacher.

These exercises were not developed in sequence, but rather as the need for them arose. Because every writing teacher responds to particular problems as they arise in student essays, we encourage you to use these chapters as the need arises. For instance, initially students may show no difficulty with sentences, but as they develop syntactical maturity you may find Chapter 7, “Sentences,” helpful in explaining the necessity of properly sequencing information in sentences.

Chapter 1, “Molly and Ned,” uses a party game to demonstrate how we seek information only in the content of language. By game’s end, students discover many other aspects of language (structure, diction, syntax) that are important to writing.

Chapter 2, “Throwing the Eraser,” involves students in writing by demonstrating the interaction of observer/writer and event. By redefining a simple event several times, students discover that a particular observer’s predisposition toward similar events and that observer’s choice of words to describe that event combine to *create* the event. Thus, a “fact” is actually an event created by a writer/observer and agreed to by readers.

Chapter 3, “Study of Two Pears,” uses the explication of a poem to combine the points of the first and second chapters in a demonstration of how students can enrich and structure their descriptive writing.

Chapter 4, “Group Story,” describes an in-class activity in which students compose aloud a story based on an event in a newspaper article. Selection of detail is emphasized.

Chapter 5, “Beginnings,” shows how to look for journalism’s *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* in a prose piece’s first sentence. Not all these elements are found, however, and the missing ones are the essay’s subject. This chapter also examines point of view, function of titles in relation to first sentences, and how to decide where the essay should start.

Chapter 6, “Words,” introduces students to the sounds of words and emphasizes the importance of using specific words, especially verbs, to give a clear picture.

Chapter 7, “Sentences,” is a nuts-and-bolts chapter that discusses the sentence as a complete thought picture. The class revises professional and student sentences for more specific diction, properly sequenced information, and organic form.

Chapter 8, “Paragraphs,” enables students to be more deliberate about paragraph writing by looking at their own paragraphs and discussing revision.

Chapter 9, “Figures of Speech,” examines purpose and structure in metaphor, simile, and paragraph-length analogy.

Chapter 10, “Endings,” provides methods for recognizing when to stop and methods for using organic form to signal a conclusion to the reader.

Chapter 11, “How a Workshop Works,” describes the preparation for and the operation of workshops. Two workshop structures and their merits are presented in step-by-step detail.

Chapter 12, “Summarizing the Essay,” develops a uniform structure of summary sentences, a device not only for abstracting an essay’s point but for finding it. Summary sentences also tell student authors whether they have said what they intended to say.

Chapter 13, “Revision,” presents strategic and tactical revision techniques. Among these are outlining after the rough draft, listening for notable sentences to find your true subject, and comparing classmates’ editing.

The appendixes address four issues in writing that are not directly related to the classroom. Appendix A contains samples of student essays and our critiques of those essays. Appendix B discusses the difficult question of evaluating students’ performance. Appendix C provides a bibliography of professional essays. Appendix D contains sample writing assignments for students.

THE WRITING SKILLS PROGRAM

Writing Skills I, the course in which we developed and tested the methods and exercises presented here, is the introductory course of a 3-year writing program. Writing Skills I provides fundamental tools for verbally gifted youth; it facilitates a precocious interest in and moves students through the subject at a rate more accelerated than that normally possible at the junior high/high school level. The goal of Writing Skills I is to develop in students an effective and imaginative expository style based on familiarity with the semantic, structural, and rhetorical resources of the English language.

In Writing Skills II, students develop effective, analytic writing through a study of the subtleties of tone and intention, argument and persuasion, voice and audience. Critical readings complement the process.

Writing Skills III (The Crafting of Fiction) analyzes the intricacies of fiction’s purpose, method, and process through discussions of professionally written works of fiction and workshops of student stories.

The success of Writing Skills students can be measured by both standardized test scores and more intangible achievements. Students take the College Board’s Advanced Placement Test in English Language and Composition upon completion

of Writing Skills II (after only 52 hours of instruction). The results have been very good. For example, 16 of 21 students taking the test in the first course cycle received scores of 3 or higher, thus qualifying them for college credit. Students have also excelled in writing, as indicated by second place standing in the essay competition during the 1982 Academic Decathlon in Los Angeles and the recent acceptance by the Rowohlt Verlag in the Federal Republic of Germany of short stories written by three students. These stories will appear in an anthology devoted to growing up in America alongside contributions from such authors as Richard Brautigan and Keith Abbott.

The need among all students for comprehensive training in writing is well documented. A recent report of the National Council of Teachers of English indicates that only 3 percent of writing in high school non-English courses is paragraph length or longer. Significantly, the report also documents that only 10 percent of writing in English courses is paragraph length or longer. But the most talented students, those whose display of writing ability contrasts markedly with less talented students, often receive no more guidance than "A, good work." Given the demands on teachers' time, such brevity is understandable; but talented and aspiring writers nevertheless need deliberate criticism to grow intellectually.

Out of concern about the writing skills of gifted and talented youth, three departments of The Johns Hopkins University—Classics, German, and The Writing Seminars—cooperated to establish in 1978 the Program for Verbally Gifted Youth (PVGY). However, Hopkins's involvement with educating the gifted began much earlier, in 1971, with the pioneering efforts of Dr. Julian C. Stanley and his Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY). The success of both SMPY and PVGY prompted Dr. Steven Muller, President of Johns Hopkins, to establish in July 1979 the Office of Talent Identification and Development (now known as the Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth, or CTY). CTY serves as the "umbrella" organization for SMPY and PVGY and is directly responsible to Dr. Richard P. Longaker, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

CTY serves two major functions for gifted youth: talent identification and program development. The annual Regional Talent Search identifies students of high academic abilities in the mid-Atlantic and new England states. Approximately 66,000 students have participated in the 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983 CTY Regional Talent Searches. Seventh graders or, if in higher grades, those not yet 13 years old qualify for the search by ranking at or above the 97th percentile on either the mathematical, verbal, or total composite scores of a national, school-administered test battery. Qualified students who register for CTY's Regional Talent Search by the November deadline then take the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), both the mathematical and verbal sections, as well as the Test of Standard Written English. Students with outstanding scores on the SAT are eligible for various awards, including one-course scholarships at local colleges

and universities and partial tuition grants for CTY's programs in mathematics, the sciences, and the humanities.

The programs developed by CTY are distinctive. In the precalculus course, students complete high school mathematics at a pace commensurate with their abilities. The verbal and science coursework can also be accelerative; students may obtain college credit through the College Board's Advanced Placement Program examinations. However, most verbal and science coursework is not meant to accelerate a student's progress through the school grades, but instead to establish the intellectual foundation for future advanced work in these disciplines. The classes are intensive and, for the most part, comparable to college freshman-level work.

CTY selects teachers from the Johns Hopkins community, from the Maryland Academy of Sciences, and from among the leading advanced-placement high school teachers throughout the United States. They are distinguished by their intellectual ability, their mastery of a subject area, and their enthusiasm for teaching. Many of the staff are former proteges of the programs and thus serve as outstanding role models for their students. For example, a majority of the math teachers completed undergraduate studies at an early age, and some earned graduate degrees much earlier than usual. A few have been honored as Rhodes Scholars at Oxford University, England, and as Churchill Scholars at Cambridge University, England.

Commuter classes are offered on weekends during the academic year and weekdays during the summer at Johns Hopkins sites in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., at satellite centers in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, and at five sites in New Jersey. A special feature of CTY is the 3-to-6 week summer residential programs located on two college campuses in Pennsylvania, at Dickinson College in Carlisle and at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, where gifted students may both pursue a rigorous academic course and interact socially. A comment from the parent of a former student of the program represents the impact of CTY's efforts:

The program was important [to my child's] education. . . . I wanted to express our gratitude in other than trite words, but old standbys like "meaningful" kept coming to mind. The experience *was* meaningful; in addition to putting our child a little farther down the road by the acceleration of his studies, the program also gave him a chance to mix with his peers, those intellectually his equal and/or superiors. In all, the experience was an eye-opener for all three of us (mother, father, and child). Our child had a chance, also, to put his intellectual abilities in a better perspective. He has made some choices about what he wants in the future, in what his goals are, and in what he wants to do with his life.

Such a strong impact results from two points in the educational philosophy of PVGY. The first is the conviction that at an early age verbal reasoning ability can be guided beneficially by a disciplined and systematic exposure to the basic tools of written communication. "Basic" here does not mean simple and unequivocal, but rather that which is fundamental to language conceived as a powerful communicative tool. The second point is that writing is not an insular subject, but rather a complex of related disciplines combining to inform the student of a language's traditions, limitations, and possibilities. Thus, in addition to its Writing Skills program, PVGY offers courses in German, Chinese, Ancient Greek, Latin, etymologies, and American history.

The pedagogical objective of the Writing Skills program, as of all PVGY courses, is to provide verbally gifted youth academic challenges comparable to those already offered youths with other types of talent. Writing Skills does not attempt to teach creativity as an objective. While imagination and individual thought are encouraged, the program's goals are practical. Form is given to the creative impulse; that form is an effective and imaginative writing style.

With particular delight, we present in this book a description of lessons from the Writing Skills I course. We hope it assists everyone who is concerned about the writing skills of our nation's youth, and we remind you of an old (and sometimes forgotten) maxim: A lesson is only as good as its teacher. The techniques described here work effectively when highly talented and motivated students are joined with teachers who believe in gifted children and who are extremely knowledgeable about what they teach. For these teachers, a concern for writing must be an all-consuming passion, and that passion must be passed on to the students.

Acknowledgments

We owe thanks to more people than we can list. The late Curt Whitesel, Editorial Director at Aspen Systems, had the foresight to see this book as unique and useful. The Johns Hopkins University encouraged our work with verbally gifted youth. Dr. Julian C. Stanley's pioneering and enthusiastic work with gifted students at Johns Hopkins set us on our way. Mrs. Mary Camerer's wise words guided us as young writers about to teach gifted youth; we continue to cherish her advice. Jennifer Isaacs, once a verbally gifted youth and now a gifted writer, edited, typed, and conferred with us above and beyond the call of duty. All the past and present teachers of CTY's writing skills classes contributed their expertise; Michael Martone, for instance, first connected the party game in Chapter 1 with functional fixedness. Most importantly, our students' desire "to get things straight" has taught us everything we know about teaching writing. We promise to keep learning.

Introduction

Three factors characterize the Johns Hopkins Model for Writing Instruction: motivated students, a teacher who cares about writing, and an environment that encourages investigation of the written word. Together, students and teachers investigate texts that have been written to shape more effectively texts that will be written. Thus, this book is less concerned with invention, with helping student writers generate ideas, than with helping them discover for themselves tools with which they can communicate the ideas they generate.

The Preface described the academic qualities of students and teachers, but the role of both as coinvestigators in a suitably encouraging environment remains to be described.

THE WORKSHOP

An essential part of our program is the workshop. Composed of 15 students (none of our classes can be larger than 15 students), the writing workshop is an apprentice situation with a published author as master of the craft. It has two primary activities: the examination of a professional essay to determine how it works, and a similar examination of a student essay to determine how it can be improved. Occasionally, the workshop examines smaller pieces of prose, but always with the sense that these units are part of a larger whole. The word is part of the sentence, the paragraph, and the essay. Generally, writing assignments are given after a professional essay has been discussed in terms of technique; students are encouraged to experiment with various techniques in their own writing.

The instructor functions as an organizer, a fellow investigator, and a moderator. First, as an organizer, the teacher chooses which problems to pose, based on a reading of all the students' essays. Second, as a fellow investigator, the teacher poses those problems by asking questions. Third, as moderator, the teacher guides students away from dead-end discussions and toward the resolution of a problem.

The exercises in this book incorporate the second and third functions, providing both questions and guidance toward their answers. The organizational function results from evaluating a group of student essays, after which the teacher chooses which chapter to apply.

The instructor is acknowledged as an authority only by virtue of greater experience. Because each essay, each paragraph, each sentence poses its own unique problem, it is impossible for the teacher to possess *the* single, correct solution. The less teachers impose answers, the more students will look to each other for creative solutions. As writers, one way we have found to set the tone of a workshop is to relate problems we have encountered in our own work; this demonstrates not only that we never have all the answers, but that creative problem-solving is an ongoing process. Instructors who are not writers can—as we also do—make temporary “teachers” of students whose work does not share the problems found in the majority of essays; these students provide tentative answers that the instructor “interprets” and “translates,” as needed, for the rest of the class. In practice, students as a group often generate both questions and solutions, the teacher merely interpreting and guiding the discussion toward the most promising questions and the most productive solutions. After solving a problem, students develop confidence in themselves as a group and are increasingly successful in workshops.

An old but crucial idea is that we value most what we discover for ourselves; thus, excessive lecturing produces little in a writing class. Learning is facilitated when students work out their own solutions. There is frustration, but by working through to a solution, the workshop fosters cohesive community discussion.

And, because students as a group tend to reach consensus solutions, they learn that frustration is only temporary, that they can succeed. The success of discovery arises from the students themselves and demonstrates one of our commonly used rules for writing: “You know a lot more about writing than you think you know.”

This rule proves itself in workshop discussions of student writing. The strengths of student essays—for example, well-wrought sentences, finely constructed paragraphs, and precise diction—are often unintentional, noticed by the author only when praised in the workshop. Similarly, solutions to problems posed by student essays—suggestions for better word choice, syntax, or essay structure—are often made because they “look better.” Early in the course, students may not have learned to use terms like *focus* or *point of view*, but they intuit what works well in a given essay.

Where does this intuition come from? Constant manipulation of language—speaking and reading—provides all of us with a sense of what “looks” or “sounds” better. Though we ordinarily seek information from language, we also develop an ear for its music and form. (See Chapter 1, “Molly and Ned.”) As students examine professional essays under the guidance of a teacher, their ability to respond to each other’s essays with specific, constructive comments matures.

The development of specific opinions about an essay takes time; at the outset of the course students must begin learning to read carefully, noting structure as well as content. One way to introduce students to writerly reading is to have them compose while reading three relevant questions that will be asked in the workshop. Questions provide a way for students to speak with each other in a nonthreatening manner; they are not committed to an opinion about the writing. Questioning something unclear in an essay can easily engage timid students more actively in group discussion.

Of course, students are always nervous the first time their own essays appear in the workshop, but more often than not, this anxiety transforms into excitement once interested peers begin seriously commenting. If the class response is balanced with both praise and constructive criticism, authors will be pleased that their work elicits so much attention.

Two necessary ingredients of the workshop process are honesty and specificity. Honesty comes from the assumption—first demonstrated by the teacher in written and spoken comments—that everyone in the workshop cares about writing, that everyone wants to communicate ideas more clearly. All students have a stake in the essay under discussion; the quality of discussion now will affect the quality of discussion later, when their own essays appear in the workshop. That stake requires honest and specific assessments of how well the writing serves its purpose for its audience. Whether praise or constructive criticism, these assessments require a specificity that comes from a knowledge of human nature, a knowledge that vague comments will not improve someone's writing, but may in fact destroy the writer. Thus, the group must convince the student author that, though a particular tactic does not succeed, this other tactic will, and with better results. Combining honesty with specificity engenders a workshop environment that is both productive and valuable.

Structuring the Workshop

There are, of course, many ways to structure a workshop, depending on the personalities of the instructor and the students. Young writers often need a highly structured environment until they understand the difference between constructive criticism and unsubstantiated opinions, such as, "I don't like the essay." The instructor's responsibility is to move students beyond generalities as quickly and painlessly as possible. This can be done by asking questions that lead students back to the essay's text until they find specific points on which to focus.

Chapter 11, "How a Workshop Works," describes two workshop structures. The most highly structured workshop is summarized below.

Individual writers read their essays to the class and then remain silent until the discussion's end, when one sentence of defense is allowed (watch for run-ons) about any given point. This rule prevents authors from engaging in lengthy

explanations of their intent, requiring instead patient listening. Frustration results, reinforcing the need for clarity.

After the reading comes the “opening celebration,” during which each student comments on one specific strength of the essay. This could be a word, a sentence, or an idea. When students realize they agree about what works, they generate rules for writing. For example, if three students appreciate the only simile in the essay, the group sees the positive results from the use of similes in prose.

After the opening celebration, students who have signed up for a particular area of expertise comment. *Mechanical engineers* are responsible for grammar; *transitional traffic cops* are responsible for transitions between sentences and paragraphs; and *narrative technicians* are responsible for making sure the ideas are fully developed. Of course, labels can be modified to fit the individual workshops. Comments should point to *both* strengths and weaknesses in an essay.

Comments in these three areas stimulate ideas in the general group. As the comments are exhausted, discussion spreads to the group as a whole. Each class will generate rules based on the essay at hand that apply both to the composing/ revising process and to analyzing writing for techniques. These rules are reformulated by every group in language appropriate to that group, but they fall into five general categories.

Rules for Writing

Early in the course, we often write rules in the first two general categories on the blackboard. They are principles of encouragement more than rules, and as such help develop confidence in young writers. Second category rules also encourage students to formulate rules in other categories. We emphasize that rules must usually emerge from the workshop collectively and in the workshop’s words; teachers must not impose rules nor the language formulating them.

- Category 1
- If it works, it’s okay.
 - There is no right or wrong answer.

Research into the composing process (discussed in Chapter 13, “Revision”) indicates that young writers tend to overapply rules that they have internalized. This “internal editing” stymies their composing processes and may contribute to writer’s block. However, rules in this category state explicitly that no particular method, technique, structure, or syntax is always right for all situations, either in composing or in “workshopping” essays.

In the interest of efficiently moving the workshop through a discussion, rules in this category require a corollary:

- The moderator decides if it works.

This prevents the workshop from degenerating into a pointless debate.

- Category 2 ● You know a lot more about writing than you think you know.

We advocate student-centered classes in which the guiding principle is that students initially need to be awakened to what they know.

- Category 3 ● No boring verbs.
● Circle your verbs and make sure they move.
● If you stare at a fact long enough, it will move.
● Facts act.
● Verb your nouns.
● Six uses of “is” on one handwritten page equals boredom.

These are all formulations made by students to emphasize the need for active verbs.

- Category 4 ● You can only use “so” as a transition or with a “that.”

Beginning writers tend to use weak qualifiers to boost the power of their adjectives. A workshop experience easily points out and corrects this problem.

- Category 5 ● The unexamined life is not worth living.
● Care about your subject.

This last category, again more principle than rule, reflects the fundamental assumption of this book—that teachers and students care about writing. We are not talking about concern for form or grammatical accuracy but about writing as a means of communicating, and thus as a means for sharing a unique perspective on the world (see Chapter 2, “Throwing the Eraser”).

Obviously, the rules in these categories will not help teachers judge essays in the traditional sense of grading. Our ultimate goal with these rules and with this book is not to abet error hunting among either teachers or students, but to stimulate thought about what we consider some of the most important aspects of writing and thinking.

As with any apprenticeship, the purpose of a writing workshop is to learn how to craft a finished product. The job of the teacher as master of the craft is to stimulate the apprentices’ thought about the various aspects of crafting. The ultimate aim of

the craft master, however, is to see that the apprentices integrate all the aspects of the craft. Then the teacher may cease teaching; the apprentices have learned to teach themselves, perhaps to teach others.

We hope this book will teach writing instructors how to teach themselves and, thus, their students. We most fervently hope that, when a student says with certainty and accuracy, “I know this is okay because it works,” teachers will know they have taught well and taught enough.

A WORD ABOUT THE WORKLOAD

Teachers of writing are over-worked and therefore underpaid. As the National Council of Teachers of English points out in its free statement “Workload and the Teaching of Secondary School English,” with a load of 100 students, a minimum of 20 minutes per week per student merely to evaluate writing requires 33.3 hours—four working days! That is in addition to preparation and in-class time.

We know that the prospect of running a successful writing workshop must be intimidating to English teachers who already feel overworked. Unfortunately, developing solutions to this problem does not fall within the scope of this book. While we hasten to remind you that most of the exercises in this book can be performed easily in a 50-minute class and that it is also entirely possible to successfully workshop a student essay in the same time, the ultimate solution is a lessened workload.

Until that millenium arrives, be assured there are many creative solutions to the paperload dilemma. The National Council of Teachers of English (1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Illinois 61801), an organization for professionals, has a wide selection of books suggesting solutions for the excessive paperload (among other problems). Write.

Part 1

Preparing To Write

Chapter 1

**Molly and Ned:
A Party Game**

Objectives

1. to expand one's perception of language
2. to expand one's interpretation of one's own experience
3. to be able to differentiate between form and content in writing
4. to be able to work effectively and efficiently in groups
5. to listen carefully to one another

1

FOR THE TEACHER

Molly and Ned, a party game adapted for the classroom, is an excellent initiation into a writing class. Not only do students see the necessity for a wider perception of language, they also become in one hour a well-established group as they huddle in their teams to solve the riddle, “What’s Molly and Ned?”

EXERCISES

Functional Fixedness

Borrowed from psychology, functional fixedness is a term that describes our patterns of perception. As human beings, we have many structures from which we view the events of our lives, and we hold these perceptions as valuable. These are our perceptions of reality. A visit to another culture always proves to be an eye-opening experience, in part because what we hold as valuable may be considered a waste of time there. In our own country, take, for example, our eating habits. We all agree on certain types of food that are incorporated into our three daily meals. For breakfast, we most likely fix eggs and toast, not a hot fudge sundae. By incorporating eggs into our morning diet (not too many, says the AMA), it is expected that we will have a better chance to live a long and healthy life. This pattern is therefore perceived as functional: it contributes to healthy life as well as reinforces that we are “living right” (I eat eggs, therefore I am). Our eating habits,

work habits, and sleep habits are born from generations of experience, passed on to the young, and adopted readily, without question.

This repetition of patterns in our behavior creates a “fixedness,” since we constantly rely on them to work. But what if Rebecca Star from Hometown, U.S.A. was to suddenly experience stomach pains after her scrambled eggs? Here, the unexpected has occurred, and she considers adjusting her diet. Now we arrive at the main point of the discussion: Should we reevaluate the situation *only* when something as extreme as a stomach ache occurs? Fixing on a pattern simply because it works closes the door on other experiments that could work just as well. Fixedness, then, can limit our experience. Granted, we do not have the time nor the interest to examine the possibilities of everything we do, but a total submission to preordained patterns can hinder our individual potential. Therefore, it is useful for students to understand functional fixedness so that they can see beyond its limitations.

Functional fixedness can become a household word in the classroom. Students advance quickly beyond the notion of one right answer, one way of seeing things. To be functionally unfixed, the students actively search for their own way of understanding the world, based on their own particular experiences. In general, we are fixed with language. The game of Molly and Ned demonstrates this fixedness with language while at the same time insisting that students become unfixed in order to solve the puzzle. By becoming unfixed, they are challenged to pursue a more ambitious exploration of language, beyond supplying information. Students find Molly and Ned a difficult and frustrating game to play, but at the same time they feel challenged when they discover that their most needed pattern of language is missing.

Introductory Discussion

When students are first introduced to the notion of functional fixedness, they will take the words apart and come up with their own ideas. After a few minutes of brainstorming, if the instructor asks them how they get from the front of the building to the classroom, they will begin to see that functional fixedness stems, in part, from patterns we adopt in order to make the world a place in which we can function smoothly. It consists of the habits and routines we establish so that we do not have to make up the world each day we get out of bed. Students will come up with their own examples: how they get up each morning, how they brush their teeth, go to school, get ready for bed—all living proof of the many repeated patterns we follow, without a thought, each day of our lives.

These are the patterns; they are functional. But what of the fixedness? Students, sensing the negative connotations of the word, will theorize that habits and routines are potential ruts in our experience. This is the first crack in the functional fixedness shell, opening suddenly the prospect of taking a different route to

school. It gives the students their first insight into writing: in order to write well, you must experience ordinary events as if for the first time. This means you become both participant and observer. At this point, it is helpful to bring in other examples, like Alexander and the Gordian knot or Ernest Hemingway's ability to see 80 pictures in an inkblot when the average is only 12 (he turned the card around). In both these instances risks were taken and rewarded. The rules students have learned in their high schools or social circles have made them comfortably fixed. Your suggestion that they have a choice is both exciting and terrifying.

Playing the Game

Now that the students think they understand, write the names *Molly* and *Ned* on the board. Divide the class into two teams. Begin by saying, "The name of the game is Molly and Ned. The object of the game is to guess the rules of the game. You may ask me questions that I can answer yes or no."

Each side gets a turn. "Do you use a board?" "Do you play with cards?" "Do you win money?" These are common openers; however, do not be surprised if the questioning immediately jumps to "Are Molly and Ned married?" Your answer is simple: If the first letter of the last word of the question begins with the letters A through M, your answer is yes; if that word begins with the letters N through Z, your answer is no.

Immediately, the game demands that the students listen to each other in order to compile information. It is helpful to repeat the questions back to them as a way of insisting that they speak in complete sentences. Often, the questions will ramble on and trail off so that you cannot determine the last word. Encourage the students to condense their questions, then repeat them. This provides a clue toward the final answer, about which the more suspicious students will begin to have some ideas.

After about 15 minutes, the students will hear some contradictions. "Are we playing the game?" "Yes." "Are we playing the game now?" "No." Thus, the frustration begins; hair is ruffled, feet are shuffled, you are accused of lying, and some students even threaten to quit. This is a good time to acknowledge their frustration as part of the process and to remind them of functional fixedness. Hopefully, they will scramble around for other patterns. Encourage this, emphasize it, and elicit as many patterns as you can.

This produces a trial-and-error period with some outrageously clever ideas for patterns (the grammatical order of the question, in which hand you are holding the chalk, on what side of the room you are standing). The students will unite as a class against the teacher to figure out the answer; a class spirit is pervasive. This can go on as long as you like; so far, in our experience, 50 minutes has been as long as most classes have needed. When the students realize that the solution has something to do with the question, it is only a matter of fine tuning their search for the exact pattern.

Follow-up Discussion

This is the crucial moment. You now need to move the students quickly into the larger objective of the game; otherwise they may remember only the silliness and frustration. Write a noun on the board, for example, “CAT,” and ask the students what it is. If anything has made sense in the previous hour, each student should be able to come up with a different answer, just as Hemingway did (a noun, a cat, an animal, an acronym, chalk on the board, lines and curves, etc.). Now, go back to Molly and Ned and trace the route the students constructed to arrive at the correct answer, for example, their first realization of a contradiction, their sudden attention to Molly and Ned as people, and their final experimentation with the words in the question. Ask them how functional fixedness relates to this exercise. Initially, they were listening only for *content information*. This was the fixedness that, in this case, was not functional.

Feeling relieved and successful, the students begin to see the possibility of language. Written words are visual; they are physical; they produce sounds as well as information. These sounds become words simply because we all agree to make them so with our eyes and our minds. Language is everywhere, and therefore, like fish in water, we take it for granted. Once we remove language from its comfortable place as strictly an information giver, the potential for discussion increases tenfold.

Examples

The following examples demonstrate the difference between looking at form and looking at content in a piece of prose. This is an essential differentiation to develop in the first week if you plan to look at examples of published prose throughout the semester. The students must be instructed in how to discuss an essay beyond referring merely to its content, or else the lesson may result in emphasizing just themes, not language.

Example 1

The assailant returned. By then, Miss Genovese had crawled to the back of the building, where the freshly painted brown doors to the apartment house held out hope for safety. The killer tried the first door; she wasn't there. At the second door, 82-62 Austin Street, he saw her slumped on the floor at the foot of the stairs. He stabbed her a third time—fatally. (Gansberg, 1964).¹

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The following questions should be used for discussion:

- What is the basic information to be conveyed?
- What is the added information? Why is it there?
- What effect does sentence length have on the action?
- How is suspenseful music created simply with the language?
- What is the effect of the final dash?

This example can be easily understood with a brief discussion of TV cop shows and their camera work.

Example 2

This seems to be an era of gratuitous inventions and negative improvements. Consider the beer can. It was beautiful—as beautiful as the clothespin, as inevitable as the wine bottle, as dignified and reassuring as the fire hydrant. A tranquil cylinder of delightfully resonant metal, it could be opened in an instant, requiring only the application of a handy gadget freely dispensed by every grocer. Who can forget the small, symmetrical thrill of those 2 triangular punctures, the dainty pfft, the little crest of suds that foamed eagerly in the exultation of release? (Updike, 1964).²

The following questions should be used for discussion:

- What is the basic information to be conveyed?
- What is the author's point of view?
- What words reveal this?
- What effect is created by sentence length?
- How does the use of the dash differ from the previous example?

This example points to the possibility of writing about anything. Combining a rather ordinary subject with language that has never kept company with it before produces a perception of a beer can that is new.

CONCLUSION

Breaking out of functional fixedness is more than simply taking a different route home. Take the same route but experience it differently; observe what you are

²Reprinted from the *New Yorker*, © 1964, the *New Yorker*.

participating in. This will create new patterns of perception of the same event in the same order. It is necessary, as writers, to develop this flexibility in our perceptions so that what we invent on paper will be fresh, will provide the reader with a new way of looking at things.

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Throwing the Eraser: A Definition of Writing

Objectives

1. to define writing for the student
2. to define creative writing not as imagining reality but as shaping or creating it
3. to demonstrate that reality is created by clear and reasonable communication
4. to communicate both a specific event and its context through connotation and denotation of words (diction)
5. to define an event as both an action and the writer's interpretation of or attitude toward that action
6. to realize that the writer's interpretation or attitude is determined by the context in which the event is observed

2

PREASSIGNMENT

In preparation, the students read pages 260 to 269 in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig, 1974).

FOR THE TEACHER

A major problem facing teachers of expository writing is the student misconception that creative writing means only fiction writing. Students see nonfiction writing as a mindless regurgitation of facts by a writer who is more a medium for transmitting information than a shaper of a message. The following exercise employs pantomime, the toss of an eraser, and an excerpt from Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to argue for a new normative definition of creative writing as clear and reasonable written communication, not the imagining of fictional events.

Students with an erroneous understanding of creative writing see the nonfiction writer as something like a television camera. They assume that the written product, like a television picture, represents truthfully whatever the writer or camera sees. *Represents* is the key word in the last sentence; communication *re*-presents. This chapter's exercise indicates that the reader or viewer does not see the actual event, only a *re*-presentation of it.

A TV camera makes people appear 10 pounds heavier. The size of the TV screen determines how clearly wrinkles or a five o'clock shadow appears on a face. A passing airplane can make the image on a screen roll. The direction in which a

camera is pointed can make a mob out of 20 people. Between an event and its representation, there are more variables than a computer could count, each affecting what readers and viewers see and understand.

All these variables are contained in the three components of re-presentation: (1) an event, (2) an observer, (3) the observer's communication of the event. Essentially, this chapter's exercise argues that the event interacts with the observer and the communication to make, shape, or "create" reality. A "media event" is a good example of this interaction; something happens only because cameras and reporters are present to record it.

The tacit assumptions of the exercise are that students resist writing nonfiction because they perceive themselves as nonparticipants in boring reportage, but that, once they understand how they participate in shaping reality through their writing, their resistance will dissipate—and not only dissipate, but be replaced by the excitement of being involved in the world.

The steps to achieving this excitement are simple. The mime demonstrates the importance of attitude and action in an event. Tossing the eraser demonstrates connotation and denotation in diction (how attitude and action affect word choice). Connotative and denotative diction help to produce clear and reasonable written communication. And finally, written communication demonstrates how the observer, the communication, and the event interact to make, shape, or create reality.

This chapter's exercise is best used soon after Molly and Ned (see Chapter 1). The Molly and Ned game shows that there is more to language than information; this chapter argues that there is more to nonfiction than the transmission of information. This exercise is another attempt to break out of functionally fixed understandings.

EXERCISES

What Is Communication?

The preassigned reading of Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) introduces the idea that reality is created. In the assigned excerpt, Pirsig summarizes Jules Henri Poincaré's history of the development of nonEuclidean geometries. Poincaré contends that geometries are chosen to solve problems not on the basis of truth (they are all equally true) but on the basis of convenience. Pirsig extends that contention to any fact (mathematical or not). A fact, Pirsig writes, is chosen because it best contributes to "a relation of things that results in the universal harmony that is the sole objective reality." He continues:

What guarantees the objectivity of the world in which we live is that this world is common to us with other thinking beings. Through the commu-

nications that we have with other men we receive from them ready-made harmonious reasonings. We know that these reasonings do not come from us and at the same time we recognize in them, *because of their harmony*, the work of reasonable beings like ourselves. (p. 268)¹

Before the students arrive in the classroom, their reading has introduced them to many ideas about observers, communications, and reality. But in the above passage, Pirsig defines convenience as that which results in universal harmony. Reality is a received, ready-made harmonious reasoning, an idea that makes sense. And since ideas are received only by communicating, the students understand that receivers must agree to the harmony of a communication's content. That is, an idea that makes sense must be communicated sensibly. The class arrives ready to explore the content of a communication.

What Is a Fact?

The classroom exercise does not begin with a discussion of the reading: the students will voluntarily cite Pirsig as the exercise progresses. Though the students may indicate some confusion as the class begins, the instructor can be confident that Pirsig's prose and point are not too complex for verbally talented students. Over the years of the Hopkins program, junior high school students have never failed to exhibit sudden comprehension by volunteering relevant passages from Pirsig at the appropriate time.

Exploration of a communication's content begins when the instructor solicits from the class definitions of fiction and nonfiction. In assembling definitions, the instructor should include the students' attitudes toward the two forms of writing, since attitude will ultimately be demonstrated as integral to the makeup of a fact.

Here are some definitions agreed upon in one class:

- *fiction*—imagined, unreal, your own story, fun
- *nonfiction*—factual, boring, based on reality, no fun
- *fact*—something that “is,” an event, a happening

The need to define fact arises from the definition of nonfiction as factual.

Here, the mime takes over. The instructor requests the students to write down the action and attitude of the mime but not discuss their writings with each other. There is no precise form for this writing; some students may use only words or phrases, others may create small paragraphs. Any form is acceptable.

¹Reprinted from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert M. Pirsig with permission of William Morrow & Co., Inc., © 1974 by Robert M. Pirsig.

The mime performs a series of simple, discreet actions. (Rebecca Newton of the St. Joseph's Performance Center, Durham, N.C. helped to formulate this exercise.) Actions such as walking, pushing, or opening a window serve well. Either after each performance or after all the performances, the students read their work to the class.

Be prepared for noise and laughter. The laughter is part of the exercise. When students read their responses to each performance, they see that not only the action, but the interpretation of the action (the attitude) seen on the mime's face and shared by the audience, creates laughter.

The students will almost always agree as to the action ("the mime was pushing something heavy") with only minor variations as to attitude ("the pushing was difficult because her face was straining"). At this very early point in the course, do not stop to correct grammar, though praise for good writing is always necessary. Congratulations are also in order for the group, since, as the instructor points out, it has just demonstrated communication, which is the sharing of "ready-made harmonious reasoning." Pirsig is correct. In this case, the mime communicated to the class that one has a difficult time pushing something heavy.

The next step in the exercise requires the instructor to confuse the students. The purpose of this confusion is to have the group discover for itself the argument of the exercise. Discovery follows a certain amount of frustration and problem solving, but if the instructor acts as a leader instead of a guide, as an authority instead of a fellow investigator, discovery becomes merely a game in which the students guess the instructor's answer (see Introduction, also Reynolds, 1981).

The instructor throws—as nondescriptively as possible—a chalk eraser toward a student. The most ill-behaved student is a likely candidate, but so is the best. Be sure that all the students see the toss. Solicit different simple sentences describing the event. It may be necessary to specify that a different verb is required; as verbs change, so will prepositions.

Typical sentences might read:

- Dan was hit by the eraser.
- Ben tossed the eraser to Dan.
- Ben threw the eraser at Dan.
- Ben projected the eraser toward Dan.

It may be useful to have the mime demonstrate these four sentences while the students observe again both action and attitude. In the first instance, the mime receives a blow from something unidentified. In the second and third, the verb dictates different speeds as well as different body and facial gestures. In the last instance, little more than nondescript motion is detectable.

Confusion appears when the instructor asks which sentence represents the truth. A very bright student might note that the first, passive sentence is an example of

the perpetratorless crime; just as “the window was broken by the baseball” removes the swinger of the baseball bat, the first sentence removes an actor from the event and evades the truth. Another student may argue that “tossing” the eraser *to* Dan would be true if Dan were about to clean the board. Another may argue that, since teachers sometimes “throw” erasers *at* misbehaving students, that sentence must be true. Still another may cite Poincaré’s claim that “the more general a fact, the more precious it is” (Pirsig, 1974, p. 265), and therefore an eraser “projected *toward* Dan” best describes what one of our students called “the immutable event.”

At this point, a short review of why Poincaré valued general facts is in order. The preassigned text indicates that general facts are precious because they reoccur most often. Reoccurring facts establish rules, and though at first rules may seem discordant in terms of content, they are alike in terms of form. This similarity of form makes facts and rules valuable (Pirsig, 1974, pp. 265–266).

Why, the instructor may ask the class, does a general fact preserve the immutable event best? Because “projected toward” carries the least attitudinal freight of all the verb-preposition groups; these two words have fewer connotations than the others. (This offers a good opportunity to define and explain connotation and denotation.) Students may correctly note that the mime’s performance of “projected toward” most nearly resembles the instructor’s original action.

This is an important point, since it allows the instructor to ask why and how other students decided that “tossed to” and “threw at” also describe the event. Put another way, if none of us were in the room when the eraser was “projected toward” Dan, how would we know which of the four sentences (communications) is accurate?

A method for answering this question is to reconsider the earlier arguments for each sentence’s veracity. Good behavior elicits a tossing *to*, misbehavior a throwing *at*. How do we know that? From prior experience. Repeated throwing of erasers at misbehaving students in the past has established a rule that is valuable for understanding an event in the present. The question remains, however: Which of the four sentences, each representing a different fact/rule, is correct?

Again, the solution is methodological. Experience dictates that, if Ben is a teacher who in the past has thrown erasers at misbehaving students, and if Dan is a student who has just now been misbehaving, it is likely that Ben threw the eraser at Dan. Not only is it likely, it is reasonable. In the context of prior experience, we recognize the sentence “Ben threw the eraser at Dan” as the work of a reasonable being like ourselves.

It should be clear by now that the isolated event of tossing an eraser, when described with words (“throwing at,” for instance), takes on a context that is attitudinal. The context/attitude is our prior experience (“throwing at” indicates anger). More importantly, that attitude is reasonable only when set in a larger

attitudinal context that is harmonious (“throwing at” indicates the anger of instructors at misbehaving students).

A fact, then, is not simply an event; it is an assemblage of event, attitude, and the larger context of events and attitudes *as agreed upon by other reasonable beings*. Faced with the problem “which sentence is true?” students might better ask, “Which sentence most conveniently harmonizes with the context?”

Is an Event Immutable?

It is worth noting here that, for all its McLuhanesque tones, the point of this chapter was first propounded by the Sophists: The shaping of the message shapes its content. Since shaping must take place for understanding *even in the prewriting stage*, there is a basic skepticism as to the existence of a single, verifiable truth. Put another way, the “universal harmony” that Pirsig calls “the sole objective reality” is harmonious only because people perceive that harmony. As long as we are perceivers, we are also shapers of harmony; when listening to a symphony, we perceive music, not noise. And, because we shape or decide what is harmony, we cocreate it. Objective reality is that act of cocreation.

Faced with this conclusion, students (and often teachers as well) sometimes raise the question of science. Science, they claim, discovers things that exist. “Things” here are synonymous with “immutable events;” a wall, an atom, or the circulatory system are all immutable events. The underlying assumption in each case is that it exists whether or not we know about it.

Well, not exactly. If we do not know about the existence of things, we cannot talk about them. As soon as we begin talking about them, we begin shaping *how* we talk about them. All words have some degree of connotation. When we put events in words, we put them in an attitudinal context. Thus, we begin shaping what the thing is. (For a similar discussion of science as “semantic verification,” see Postman & Weingartner, 1966, pp. 129–141.)

It is axiomatic in physics that observers and the tools of observation interact with the thing being observed. On a macroscopic level, the interaction is minimal; we can all watch the trajectory of an eraser. But on a subatomic level, interaction prevents tracing the exact path of a particle. This is so because, to track a particle’s speed and direction, the observer must bounce a particle of light (a photon) off it. When the photon touches the particle, the particle’s speed or direction is altered, and the trajectory is changed. Thus, the observers interact with the observed events. Something does indeed exist “out there,” but as soon as we begin to observe it, we begin to shape or cocreate it.

What Is Creative Expository Writing?

What does the preceding discussion have to do with fiction and nonfiction? Better put, the question might be, “What is its relevance to the difference between

fiction and nonfiction?" For, if facts are no longer immutable events, can the nonfiction writer be simply a television camera, a transmitter of information? Certainly not. Information is shaped by its transmission. A writer's choice of verbs makes the instructor a disciplinarian who throws erasers at students, a good-natured person helping a student clean the blackboard, an impersonal force projecting articles through the air, or even a force absent from the event. The instructor's role in the event, like the event itself, is shaped by the agreement of writer and readers.

An example of how the writer or observer shapes the event might be Harvey's "discovery" of the circulatory system. Until Harvey saw a pump, the standard metaphor for the functioning of the circulatory system was the ebb and flow of tides. Without the metaphor of a pump, Harvey could not have broken out of his century's fixed view to see how the heart really worked.

At this point, the light bulbs should be blinking on all around the class as those marvelous and all-important "Aha's" ring out. Creative writing is not just the filtering of an isolated event through language (for example, the "projected" eraser filtered into "threw"), but the shaping of a context through language. In each case, connotation—the communication of attitude—is important.

Dan did not just shift in his seat, he *squirmed*; he squirmed like a stranded eel. He did not merely comment to his neighbor, he was *jabbering*. Dan was misbehaving; Ben threw the eraser at Dan.

CONCLUSION

The difference between fiction and nonfiction results from context. If the preceding section's last paragraph had been fiction, it would have been surrounded by the word "lie," and no matter how consistent and convincing, the last word would end the context of the lie. Nonfiction, however, has no end. If the paragraph had been nonfiction, we would have learned something about Dan, about Ben, and about the use of erasers, even if that something were only the reinforcement of a rule/fact that we had already agreed upon.

It should be clear by now that the term *creative expository writing* means not just facts but also the attitudes conveyed by language and cocreation of reality by an immutable event on the one hand and attitude and language on the other. Examples of how creative writing has helped shape reality abound. Depending on the instructor's familiarity with them, any of the following can be cited: belief in the divine right of kings, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sir Francis Bacon's experimental method, the Declaration of Independence, and the idea of manifest destiny. These are all examples of how people broke out of their fixed ideas to see things in a new way.

Clear, written communication is of course the aim of creative expository writing. This chapter's exercise demonstrates not just the efficacy of connotative and denotative diction but the service of diction in cocreating reality, that is, mutually agreed upon "harmonious reasonings."

POSTASSIGNMENT

As a follow-up assignment, to reinforce the students' understanding that they participate in the world and that reality is something they create by trying to make sense of events, ask the students to describe and explain the importance of one major event in each of their lives.

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**Study of Two Pears:
Descriptive Writing and
Perception**

Objectives

1. to expand students' range of descriptive details
2. to practice functionally unfixed perception
3. to explore the limits of perception
4. to use language to make ordinary objects beautiful
5. to explicate and appreciate a poem
6. to structure descriptive details into useful categories before writing

3

FOR THE TEACHER

This chapter extends the ideas demonstrated in Chapter 1, “Molly and Ned,” and Chapter 2, “Throwing the Eraser.” Chapter 1 examined functional fixedness in language—the need to find information in language—and demonstrated that many other aspects of language (syntax and diction, for example) are important to writing. Chapter 2 examined how reality is shaped through words. This chapter looks at a poem that sees in a functionally unfixed way, shaping reality through language and at the same time recognizing that such shaping has limits.

The exercise divides into three parts, all of which are then employed in an essay assignment. First, the students describe the object delineated in the poem. Then, by explicating the poem, they evaluate the poet’s description of the objects. Wallace Stevens’s “Study of Two Pears” is a challenging poem, but one that students come to appreciate as their understanding grows. Finally, the students look for strategies with which to organize descriptive details. These organizational structures can then be applied in their essay assignment.

While Chapter 2 focused on the observation of an event, here we focus on the observation of ordinary objects, a pair of pears. Writing about our experience of an event is a complex process, requiring that we cull significant details from the many memories of setting, action, character, dialogue, and emotion. But writing about our observation of an object removes the complications of memory, limiting emotional and sensory distraction while still requiring the use of descriptive detail. For this exercise, students should not be too strictly subjected to time limitations. The exercise may require two 50-minute class periods to complete.

It should be remembered, however, that, as with the start of any undertaking, an initial investment of time pays off later in increased efficiency. Students with a clear, strong foundation in writing will build rapidly into competent writers.

EXERCISES

Studying Two Pears

Place two pears (or apples if pears are not in season) on a small cloth on a flat surface in the center of the room, clearly visible to all. Ask the students to observe this scene carefully and to formulate descriptions of what they see. The descriptions may be words, phrases, or sentences. Solicit a volunteer to record these descriptions on the blackboard. Tell the students that this part of the activity will be completed when the board is filled with about 50 descriptions.

At first this exercise will be easy, but after the obvious descriptions have been presented (“fruit,” “green,” “oval,” “brown stem,” “three inches long”), the students will reach an impasse and will have to leave their seats to examine the pears more closely. As the descriptions become more detailed (for example, “small brown spots on the skin”), the students will also become more imaginative, comparing the shape of a pear to that of a guitar, the smell to an early morning in summer.

Remind the class of Molly and Ned, urging the students not to be functionally fixed. Some students, looking at the stem, may think of the pear’s detachment and want to describe what is no longer there (the tree) as well as what it is. They may see the pears as a series of curves or as a complete world.

Since one objective of this exercise is to practice a functionally unfixed or new way of seeing, every idea suggested belongs on the board. The suggestions may be tangential, disorganized, sometimes inappropriate, but the discussion will surely be fun. As the students brainstorm descriptive details, they will discover the possibilities open to them in describing what they see.

Studying “Study of Two Pears”

Though an analysis of Stevens’s poem may be difficult at first, particularly for those unfamiliar with modern poetry, it may result in one of the most stimulating and sophisticated discussions you will have with your class. You will want to reassure the class that discussing a poem is no different from discussing prose. As Brooks and Warren (1979) write, “poetry is simply the most condensed and concentrated form of literature. . . . Poetry makes sense and, though it has its subtleties, it is intended to be understood” (p. 357).

Hand out copies of Wallace Stevens’s (1972) poem “Study of Two Pears” and announce that an examination of this poem will offer a chance to compare the

class's descriptive visions with those of a major American poet of the 20th century.

Here is the poem:

Study of Two Pears

I

Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else.

II

They are yellow forms
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base.
They are touched red.

III

They are not flat surfaces
Having curved outlines.
They are round
Tapering toward the top.

IV

In the way they are modelled
There are bits of blue.
A hard dry leaf hangs
from the stem.

V

The yellow glistens.
It glistens with various yellows,
Citrons, oranges and greens
Flowering over the skin.

VI

The shadows of the pears
Are blobs on the green cloth.
The pears are not seen
As the observer wills. (p. 159)¹

¹Copyright 1942 by Wallace Stevens and renewed 1970 by Holly Stevens. Reprinted from *The palm at the end of the mind: Selected poems and a play*, by Wallace Stevens, edited by Holly Stevens, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

After reading the poem aloud twice and seeing the students' confused looks, it is a good idea to reassure them that the poetry makes sense, albeit subtle sense, and that it is intended to be understood. Then discuss why the poem does not act like other poems they all know. Ask the students how it differs from those poems.

Everyone will certainly have thoughts on how this poem does not *act*. Likely answers are that it doesn't rhyme, it doesn't tell a story, it doesn't address the familiar themes of love and death.

Now ask what the poem *does*. Even a superficial reading will show that the poem uses words to draw a picture—a description of two pears, exactly as its title states. But, just as any description is more than a simple statement, the poem is more than its title. Noting that the sections are numbered, ask how the group might go about analyzing the poem.

You may want to mention that this part of the exercise is an explication, not an interpretation, of the poem. If you do so, differentiate between the two by asking the students to define the words by looking at the root words of each. Explication comes from the Latin *explicare*, *ex* (opposite) + *plicare* (to fold) = unfold, or to “explain.” Interpretation comes from the Latin *interpretare*, interpreter, negotiator, or to “translate.” Interpretation is analysis of a literary work with a special point of view in mind, while explication is simply commentary on what a literary piece is doing. Interpretation might require us to consider a poem in light of its author's whole biography and body of works, but explication of one work, according to Barnet and Stubbs (1983), “is concerned with bringing to the surface the meanings that are in the words but may not be immediately apparent. Explication . . . seeks to make explicit the implicit” (p. 333).

The students may suggest a number of procedures for explicating the poem, but the procedure we recommend is further discussion of the title followed by an examination of each section in succession. Why? Either students or the instructor should point out that this is the order in which readers first encounter any piece of writing. This order also suggests a question to guide the explication: How do the sections change as we progress through the poem?

Now open a discussion of the title by asking what it tells readers. The words “of two pears” are straightforward, but what of “study”? Its appropriateness in the title of a poem may be questioned by students who feel it goes against poetry's primary motive, which is expressive. “Study” implies objective, unemotional thinking, a poem written from the brain, not the heart.

If you are lucky enough to have a painter in your group, that student may recognize the similarity of the title to that of a still life. If not, point out the absence of an article in the title. It isn't “A Study” or “*The Study*,” just “Study of Two Pears.” Ask where else we encounter such titles.

Once students have recognized the similarity, they'll suggest possible applications to the poem. Stevens may intend the poem as a study of pears not unlike a study offered by a painter. Or, more likely, the object of his description may not be

real pears, but pears painted on a canvas, the title having been taken from a painting. In any case, the connection between painting and poem is established, and the group can look once again at the first section.

I

Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else.

The students may need to be told that *opusculum* is Latin meaning “a small or minor work;” *paedagogum* means “guide” or “teacher.” Though Stevens’s phrasing is unusual, it can be roughly translated to mean “little teaching works.” Looking at the pears, Stevens sees small but significant objects that can tell us something. Perhaps he sees them as small works of art, just as poems are small works of art. If he is describing painted pears, they are literally small works of art.

Why does Stevens state what the pears are not? One student, thinking of still life subjects, might suggest that this is a way to separate the pears from other objects, especially from viols, nudes, and bottles, which are frequent subjects in still lifes. Another student might say that Stevens uses “not” to suggest objects that initially do not exist in the reader’s mind.

What does the last line mean? You might want to ask which is the line’s key word. “Else” is the key word, and it raises questions in the reader’s mind. Nothing *more* than themselves? Nothing *other than* viols, nudes, or bottles? Can the pears contain what they are *not* as well as what they are? Can an object contain its opposite? Taking this line of questioning one step farther, can the group conclude that the process of identifying objects includes, in part, eliminating what they are not?

This line of thought suggests another question to guide the explication of Stevens’s description: What opposites does the poem contain?

II

They are yellow forms
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base.
They are touched red.

How does this section change our picture of the pears? Here the poet begins to portray the pears’ color and shape. He tells us what they are (“yellow forms”) and modifies the vagueness of form by adding “curves/Bulging toward the base.” Both the elongated syllable and the denotation of “bulging” suggest heaviness,

weight, a force pushing from within. Something bulging swells out, in this case, toward the base. Imagining the pears, a reader's inner eye moves downward toward the base. Not only do the pears have color and shape, but also force and movement.

How does Stevens supply this force? He uses alliteration, recurrence of an initial consonant sound, in lines 2 and 3. Alliteration emphasizes that the pears in the poem are in the process of being created. Finally, to further this creation, the pears are "touched red," just as by a painter's brush.

III

They are not flat surfaces
Having curved outlines.
They are round
Tapering toward the top.

Taking "not" as a clue to procedure, ask the students what opposites this section introduces. They will note that, in this section, round opposes flat and that, between sections II and III, base opposes top, shifting the reader's inner eye movement from down to up. Students attuned to the sound of words will notice the contrast of "bulging" with "tapering," the latter suggesting delicacy and lightness. Again, negation impresses on us that what the pears are not ("flat surfaces") is as central to their description as what they are. And again, the mention of "flat surfaces" implies a painting.

So, this section changes the previous section's picture of yellow, curved forms that are touched with red by adding the third dimension and further modifying the curves, giving the forms the shape of a pear.

IV

In the way they are modelled
There are bits of blue.
A hard dry leaf hangs
from the stem.

How does this section change our picture of the pears? It adds "bits of blue" and one "hard dry leaf" hanging from the stem of one pear. As description, the one leaf is eminently acceptable, but why are there bits of blue? Is there really blue on the surface of a pear?

Most students will probably answer no, and some will want to examine the pears on the table again. Rather than begin a technical debate, ask where the blue *in this poem* comes from. It comes from "the way they are modelled." But what does the passive verb suggest?

Now, lightbulbs should go on above the students' heads. "Modelled" pears suggest pears portrayed in a painting. But who has done the modelling? If opposites are important to this description, and if a central part of this description is what the pears are not, is it not possible that an equally important part is the undescribed describer?

Then who is the describer? Is Stevens the only modeller? At this point, the students may want to discuss theology. In this case, point out that applying theology to the poem is interpretation. Explication is concerned with who put the bits of blue in this particular set of pears, not in all pears.

Ask again, Who is the modeller? While some students will maintain that Stevens is the modeller, others will argue that Stevens is describing pears painted or modelled by an artist, their best evidence being the passive verb. (If Stevens were the modeller, would not he use the active voice?) Others will remember how, in Chapter 2, an event was shaped by words. They will ask if the effect of the poem's words in the second and third sections, directing our eyes up and down, does not make the reader the modeller.

If no one brings up Chapter 2 spontaneously, you will want to remind the group that in that chapter's exercise, an event was cocreated by writer and reader. When writer and reader agreed that words describing an event made sense, the two together had described the event.

This section of the poem almost explicitly introduces three modellers: an artist who paints the pears, a poet who sees the painting, and readers who see the poem about the painting. The painter offers a subject to the poet, who offers another subject to the readers.

Why does Stevens introduce the modellers? When artists (both painters and poets) create, they show us not just a copy of what is there, but also their way of perceiving what is there. We know we are seeing a unique perception because artists add their own unique contribution (in this case, "bits of blue"). As readers, we meld our unique perceptions to the artists' perceptions. The poet's words lead us to agree on *how* to perceive the pears, and thus to agree on the perception, which is the description itself.

But the group should note that lines 3 and 4 in this section present another opposite in the poem. "A hard dry leaf" contrasts life's reality with the artists' "modelled" reality. Ask the students why Stevens presents this opposite. More precisely, ask what the lines suggest that is not in the picture. The leaf, especially because it "hangs" from the stem, suggests a tree (from which the pears hang).

For the second time in this section, Stevens introduces what is not in the picture; what is not there and what is there are opposites. Trees grow real pears, and modellers create imagined pears. There is a tension in the poem between the imagination and reality. As much as we model the object we observe, it is still an object in the real world.

V

The yellow glistens.
 It glistens with various yellows,
 Citrons, oranges and greens
 Flowering over the skin.

How does this section change our picture of the pears? It provides an image of “yellow Flowering over the skin.” We have a birth of colors on the pear. Note Stevens’s repetition of “glistens” and the general principle that repetition indicates importance, and ask what the word evokes.

If that question seems too general, ask for a definition of “glisten.” The word indicates a reflected lustre. Where does the lustre come from? Of what is it a reflection? Into what does it reflect? Stevens begins to include the area around the pears by using “glisten” to evoke the image of light. The pears interact with light, changing the space around them.

It is apparent by now that the pears do not exist exclusively as pears. They are related to other objects (viols, nudes, bottles). They are related to other ideas such as life (“flowering”) and death (“hard dry leaf”). They are modelled by and exist in the space surrounding them.

VI

The shadows of the pears
 Are blobs on the green cloth.
 The pears are not seen
 As the observer wills.

How does this section change our picture of the pears? It adds shadows that are blobs, and it adds a green cloth under the pears. Perhaps more importantly, it adds “the observer.”

What opposites does this section add? The first line introduces shadows as the opposite of the previous section’s implied light. Some students might also see the “observer” as the opposite of the modellers in section IV.

Again and again, Stevens presents opposites, his point being that an object or idea cannot be experienced without at least an awareness of its opposite. This simple principle can be demonstrated by asking the students to respond with the first word that comes to mind when you say “white” (“black”), “hot” (“cold”), “up” (“down”), “out” (“in”). Though all responses will not be identical, they will nearly always indicate an opposite. To repeat, describing what something is requires at the least an implicit description of what it is not.

But opposites are not the only change this section adds to the picture of the pears. Ask the students what shadows contribute. They develop depth, enlarge the space around the pears.

Why, after five sections in which his words slowly paint beautiful pears, does Stevens end the poem by calling the shadows “blobs”? Ask the students to say the word aloud several times. What emotion does its sound evoke? Whatever label students give to that emotion, they will all agree that it is disagreeable, off-putting. Since one of explication’s primary assumptions is that every word in a piece of writing is intended to contribute to an effect, we must assume that Stevens wanted the flat note that “blobs” evokes at the poem’s end. But to what purpose?

Perhaps the last two lines of the poem can guide the group toward some answers. Solicit paraphrases of the lines—adding to, deleting from, and conflating the responses until you have one paraphrase that resembles this:

Onlookers cannot decide to see the pears only in the way they want to see them.

We cannot simply “will” our sight to see only what we want, just as we cannot say that this paper is only white (it has black inked words on it). Choosing not to see something does not mean it is not there.

Implicit in the section VI lines’ explication is the assumption that we as readers are “the observer.” To make this implication explicit, ask, Who is “the observer?” You will likely get three answers. Most obviously, each reader is an observer. But so is Stevens, who sees the painting. So is the painter who sees the pears. At least one student will probably ask how any of these three can be *both* modeller and observer. If no one asks the question, ask it of the class. Then ask for answers.

You may need to remind the group that Chapter 2 demonstrated the interaction of observer/writer with event. It also demonstrated that readers interact with the writer’s words by agreeing that they make sense. With the writer as agreed-upon intermediary, readers become observers, interacting with an event. Does Stevens’s poem present evidence of interaction with the objects? Yes. The reader’s inner eye moves up and down to model the pears’ shape. This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that all observers are also modellers.

We can say, then, that Stevens understands both a similarity and a difference between what exists in the “real” physical world and what exists in our minds. The pears he sees, the pears he imagines, and the pears he writes about share much in common, but we cannot be sure they are identical.

The “study” of this poem goes beyond pears to the disparity between reality and our perception of it. Stevens’s contrast of observer and modeller seems to be a reminder to us of the tension between reality and imagination. We may model the pears, but they are still objects in the real world. What one student in Chapter 2 called “the immutable event” here becomes “an immutable object:” the two pears that all three modellers cocreate are—somewhere, someplace, in some

time—tangible. Those very real pears refuse to be imagined out of thin air, yet they cannot ever be reproduced exactly.

Of course, this part of the study of Stevens’s “study” can go on for days, months, years—but classes cannot. In order to finish this part of the exercise, ask the students to summarize the points the poem makes about description.

The class list should include these points:

- Description may require naming what an object is not.
- Description may require naming colors and shapes.
- Alliteration can be used to provide force and movement in prose.
- The words in a description direct the movement of the reader’s inner eye.
- Description engages readers as both observers and modellers of the thing described.
- Description of light and shadow can create depth and dimension.
- Description involves the space around an object as well as the object itself.
- The sound of a word reinforces its meaning (“bulging” is a bottom-heavy word, “blob” is disagreeable).
- Describing an experience, idea, or object is a tricky process involving at least three aspects: (1) the tangible reality, (2) the modeller’s perception of that reality, and (3) the observer’s agreement with that perception.
- One way to describe an object is to reconstruct it verbally as if it were being painted or built; one must consider what the object was before it became what it is.

When each student has copied down these points about description, the group can go on to the following exercise.

Studying the Structure of Descriptive Detail

Returning to the descriptive details the students listed on the board, point out that a list that long shows how successfully writers who are functionally unfixed can generate details. After so many details have been generated in the mind, however, writers face the problem of what to do with them, which details to use, how to put them together. A description must begin with some details, must add others, and complete itself with still more.

Does Stevens offer some methods of structuring detail? Ask the class to list some of his organizing strategies. The list might include such ideas as grouping opposites or contrasts (yellow vs. red, flat vs. round), grouping similar colors (yellows, citrons, oranges), building the object from its simplest aspects (curves) to its most complex (flowering colors), and grouping background details (shadows and green cloth).

Ask also for organizing strategies that Stevens does not use. Among these are grouping physical characteristics and grouping uses for pears. Large groupings such as physical characteristics could be subdivided into groupings, such as color, size, or shape. Details could also be grouped according to the five senses. These various groupings may become paragraphs in the postassignment.

POSTASSIGNMENT

There are at least three possible writing assignments. The first two incorporate all the points made in this chapter's exercise.

1. Ask the students to write essays describing the pears they have observed in class. The essays must convince the class of the pears' significance in the world. They should make an otherwise ordinary object special; they should make the language sing.
2. Ask the students to write essays describing an object of their choice (after careful observation). The essays must convince the class of the object's significance in the world. They should make an otherwise ordinary subject special; they should make the language sing.

These two assignments present excellent opportunities to discuss the value of an interesting introduction, one that will catch the reader's attention (see Chapter 5, "Beginnings").

The third writing assignment is more evaluative than descriptive. Ask the students to summarize in at least three substantial paragraphs the key points of the discussion they have had about Stevens's pears. Ask them to relate his ideas about the process of perceiving to what they believe is true of their own processes. Finally, ask them to explain the relationship between understanding Stevens's poem and learning to write.

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Chapter 4

Group Story

Objectives

1. to practice narrative writing skills
2. to experience decision-making strategies in the selection of detail
3. to demonstrate further the concept “show, don’t tell”
4. to raise students’ level of awareness beyond stereotyped impressions of people with whom they are unfamiliar

4

FOR THE TEACHER

Group story is an activity that engages the class in recreating a given event as preparation for writing a narrative. Through role playing, the students amplify the parameters of the exercise and in so doing are compelled to confront fundamental struggles of narrative writing.

A narrative “tells a story;” it presents actions in sequence as they occur in life. If beginning writers are to be successful with narration, they will need to make the transition from “telling” a story to “showing” it. *Telling* is a misleading term that encourages flat statements like “she is ugly” or “she came into the room.” These statements leave everything to the imagination, giving the reader too much control. Readers need to see *what* she looks like and *how* she enters the room if they are to be persuaded. We must choose words that convey the most specific meaning if we are to derive the most impact from language. Narration demands that the writer tell a story by showing it. The key phrase is *show, don’t tell*.

Because expository narration goes beyond telling the story for its own sake, to communicate effectively, writers must constantly keep their purpose and audience in mind. Narration is a powerful expository pattern because the reader can experience the event as the writer describes it. Experience is our most persuasive teacher.

EXERCISES

Group story introduces the concept of *show, don’t tell* in narration with a special attention to detail. The initial selection and the subsequent presentation of the

many details available to the writer in a given situation are complex tasks. For this reason, group story asks that the class compose a story together, sorting and sifting through the many details at its disposal to discover which ones convey the most meaning.

The activity can be divided into three sections:

1. *The newspaper article.* The students read an unattributed account, apparently from a newspaper, of an assault and discuss its implications.
2. *The group story.* The students assume the role of assailants and recreate situations leading up to the attack.
3. *The assignment.* The students write a "letter to the editor" from the point of view of an assailant in order to educate the public as to what *really* happened.

The Newspaper Article

The activity begins with reading the newspaper article shown in Exhibit 4-1.

The first question is, Is the account in Exhibit 4-1 true? Actually not. As indicated, it is borrowed from John Hawkes's short story "Universal Fears," but it is best if students are not sure. Belief that the incident did occur produces a more serious discussion. If they ask, throw the question back at the students. This usually leads to a question about the similarity in names (Smyth-Jones), which they themselves can cleverly answer. One student might suggest that the reason for the similarity is that it is a small town and the inhabitants are all related. Another

Exhibit 4-1 Event Described in Newspaper Article

Teacher Assaulted at Training School for Girls

Mr. Walter Jones, newly appointed to the staff of St. Dunster's training school for girls, received emergency treatment today at St. Dunster's Hospital for multiple bruises which, as Mr. Jones admitted and Dr. Smyth-Jones, director of the school, confirmed, were inflicted by the young female students in Mr. Jones' first class at the school. Mr. Jones' predecessor, Mr. William Smyth, was so severely injured by these same students November last that he has been forced into early and permanent retirement. Dr. Smyth-Jones expressed regret for both incidents, but indicated that Mr. Jones' place on the staff would be awaiting him upon his full, and it is to be hoped, early recovery. "The public," he commented, "little appreciates the obstacles faced by educators at a school such as St. Dunster's. After all, within the system for the rehabilitation of criminally inclined female minors, St. Dunster's has been singled out to receive only the most intractable of girls. Occasional injury to our staff and to the girls themselves is clearly unavoidable."

Source: From "Universal Fears," (p. 122) by John Hawkes in *Superfiction*, J.D. Bellamy, Ed., 1975, New York: Vintage.

might suggest that perhaps those involved paid off the reporter to keep their names out of the paper.

Ask the class to analyze the article according to journalism's Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. If necessary, refresh their memories by referring to the exercise in Chapter 5, "Beginnings." The result should look something like this:

Who: Mr. Jones and female students

What: Jones was beaten by students and treated

When: Today

Where: St. Dunster's Training School and Hospital

Why: unknown

How: unknown

Jones's treatment, of course, results from the beating, and the reasons for the beating are what is missing. There is no motivation and no description of how the event transpired. Reading the article for a second time, the students may suggest that Jones was assaulted because he was teaching "the most intractable of girls." In other words, the article implies that the girls are to blame for the incident because they are bad. Teachers are good; "criminally inclined female minors" are bad.

Here, the Why is not spelled out, but it is certainly implied. The article assumes that we can accept that Jones was assaulted by the girls for no apparent reason beyond their wild nature; it assumes that we will never question whether he did anything to deserve it. Had it been a class of gifted and talented students, the reporter would not have been able to get away with that implication. Perhaps Mr. Jones was attacked, but could he have provoked the students?

The students will agree that the whole story is not contained in the article and that what is printed does little for the reputation of the girls at St. Dunster's. The article is a summary of the event, a summary that has been reported and printed; we have been *told* what happened without being *shown* anything. Delineation of the total situation is up to the reader's imagination and investigation. It is here that the search for detail begins.

Before such an investigation can begin, however, the students must face the issue of stereotypes. Immediately stereotypes flash through our heads when we are asked what the girls in this type of school look like. We all have a picture of "them" in there, and that picture is very different from how we view ourselves out here. On the board, make a list of the characteristics of this type of female. After a few characteristics have been written, a student might call out, "Those are stereotypes!" Correct. The best way to get beyond first impressions is to make a list of appropriate stereotypes so that they are out of everyone's system. A long list will soon fill up the board, and Group Story is ready to begin.

The Group Story

The initial step in the group setting is to have the students assume various character roles and experience from this new perspective the events that led up to the assault. Write “St. Dunster’s” on the board and tell them that for the next half hour they are going to pretend they are the young female minors enrolled at this school. As a group, their task will be to piece together the elements missing from the newspaper article and to give a more complete account of the incident.

In introducing this part of the activity, go around the room and ask the students to introduce themselves one by one and to explain why they have been sent to St. Dunster’s. On the surface, this sounds like an easy task; but if you, as teacher, insist on credibility, it will take serious effort by the students. Frustration can lead to silliness. (“My name is Slick. I am here because I like to run over animals with my lawnmower.”) A way to anticipate this is to begin by introducing yourself. The most believable anecdote will stand out, setting a standard for the rest of the class.

As the students introduce themselves, make a list on the board of their reasons for being at St. Dunster’s, in preparation for the next activity. When the list is finished, ask them who would most likely be the leader of their St. Dunster’s class? Who would be the followers? The student who was beaten up by her parents and then caught assaulting her younger brother is very different from the runaway in the back of the room. The student raised on the streets who stole everything she needed and wanted would perhaps have a different approach to survival at St. Dunster’s than the student neglected by a wealthy family. Getting the students involved in the possible group dynamics—how they feel about being in the class at St. Dunster’s—helps them to see their identity as individual and real rather than stereotyped and glamorous.

What is it like to be at St. Dunster’s? What does the school look like? Now we are beginning to take into account immediate environmental factors that may have led to the attack. Details become increasingly important. Details that tramp stereotyped grounds, like dingy cells and bars on windows, will be the first to be mentioned. Remind the students of the stereotypes and move on from there. Encourage them to search for those details that make the school vivid and believable. Rooms overcrowded with four bunkbeds instead of two is acceptable, but remove the pillows from the beds (to “protect” the students from one another) and the scene becomes more upsetting. As details are suggested, the class should evaluate them for their effectiveness. In this way, the students will begin to confront some of the decisions that will arise later when they write their own accounts of the story.

The teacher’s role becomes one of the devil’s advocate, guiding the students to look for what is “best.” Interestingly, some of the students will have strong ideas about what certain things should be and will work hard to convince the rest of the

class. Hearing others' responses to various suggestions adds another dimension to the act of preparing to write; the students' audience is right there with them, working out the story.

Setting is an important perspective here; it can include a variety of elements, from what the school looks like to what the rules are. A student might suggest that at night when some of them were lying in bed they could hear the sound of keys clinking from the large ring that hung from the guard's belt. This is the kind of moment that can be of value in the class. A good detail is given. It has the perfect sound, like the last click that opens the safe, and the class's perception of the event becomes more crystallized.

Setting is only half of the exercise, however; the rest involves re-creation of the event. Have the students volunteer to act out Mr. Jones walking into class the first day. Ask that they deliberately think of ways that Mr. Jones will get a response from the class. To get this across, act out the first few possibilities yourself. How does Mr. Jones walk? Where are his eyes? What does he do with his hands? His feet? This role playing can go in many directions: Mr. Jones can march into the class pronouncing rules, or he can slither in and scribble his name on the board without looking at the class. Whatever he does, make sure the students interpret how he is feeling, as a way of pointing up the value of *showing* his actions rather than *telling* about them. When the students realize that actions convey intended meaning, the *show, don't tell* concept that "actions speak louder than words" begins to sink in.

Is Mr. Jones wearing anything that would irritate the students in his class? Again, stereotypes will flare, along with memories of your students' own experiences at school. As they discuss Mr. Jones, draw him on the board so that they can see the picture they are creating. Insist that they challenge themselves to look for the one detail that will reveal something about his personality—a peculiar belt buckle or a pen in his pocket.

As a group, your students have now looked at the main elements in the story that were only suggested in the original text: *who* the students were; *how* they got into St. Dunster's; *what* Dunster's is like as a school, both physically and socially; and *what* Mr. Jones did that precipitated the attack. Your students have temporarily filled in the shadows between the article's printed words. It is now up to each of them to decide how much of the shadow remains and how much should rightfully disappear again. The responsibility clearly lies with your students, as writers, to sift and sort through the reclaimed reservoir of details and to reconstruct a story that is perhaps even more convincing than what was originally printed. They must exercise their decision-making skills as disciplined and enlightened writers.

The Assignment

Give your students the following assignment:

- Write a “letter to the editor,” giving a more complete account of the altercation and using details that will enable the reader to experience St. Dunster’s. Your intent is to persuade the newspaper readers that you, the students, are not the only ones at fault. Your “last straw” can be anything except Mr. Jones hitting a student.
- Consider who you are and how you got in, what St. Dunster’s is like, and what happened that day with Mr. Jones to precipitate the attack.

In this assignment, it is advisable to forbid the use of any details discussed in class so that the students will rely on their own decision-making ability in choosing details.

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Part II

Writing

Chapter 5

Beginnings

Objectives

1. to apply journalism's who, what, where, when, why, and how to all first sentences in *all* prose
2. to demonstrate that point of view should ideally be revealed in the first sentence in either first or third person
3. to examine how titles present an author's attitude and approach to a subject, making the reader want to read
4. to demonstrate that prose starts at one of three points in the discussion—beginning, middle, or end—the choice of which is strategic to structuring the essay

5

PREASSIGNMENT

In this minimally structured assignment, the intent is to mix creativity with consideration of what makes a good beginning. The assignment can either initiate or reinforce your discussion of beginnings, or you may choose to use it in both ways (see the section on evaluating student assignments at the end of this chapter).

- Create three titles and the first two sentences of an essay for each title.
- Use the following subjects: paper, sky, and sidewalk.
- Alternatively, use three subjects you would like to write about.

FOR THE TEACHER

Aristotle wrote that a beginning is “that which is not necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it” (Aristotle, 1976, p. 312). But for writers, a beginning’s *purpose* is to make the reader read on. The title and opening sentence work as a unit to provide information—point of view and some of journalism’s Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How (five Ws & H)—while stimulating curiosity. The choice of starting point both stimulates curiosity and organizes an essay. This chapter shows how to make beginnings work efficiently.

EXERCISES

Using Journalism's Questions

Journalism's five Ws & H apply to all first sentences in prose. That first sentence orients the reader immediately, but it also stimulates curiosity by omitting some information. Students will discover that *the subject of the writing will be the omitted information*—one or more of the five Ws & H.

The material in this section is best applied in revision. It provides maximally effective openers once writers are certain of their subjects. Overemphasis of this material in the first draft would likely stymie even the most experienced writer since, from the first sentence on, the subject begins to be narrowed and areas of discussion begin to be excluded. First draft application may unintentionally exclude the very (undiscovered) heart of the subject.

The first job is to define the five Ws & H. Solicit student definitions and note them to one side of the blackboard. For example:

- Who—people involved
- What—the event
- Where—location of who and what
- When—date, time of what
- Why—motivation for doing what who did how, where and when
- How—means by which what happened when

As you can see, part of the fun here is in the word play used in analyzing sentences: “Where’s Where?” “What’s What?” For practice in this, watch Abbott and Costello perform their “Who’s on first, What’s on second” routine.

Now, begin analyzing the following opening sentences by identifying which of the five Ws & H each provides. The point of this analysis is to find which information is *not* given. As Norman Maclean (1976) says: “All there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren’t noticing which makes you see something that isn’t even visible” (p. 92).¹

Students will notice that some of the five Ws & H apply to each opening sentence, which will make them see that others of the five Ws & H are omitted. Once they begin seeing what is not visible—a pattern of omission—you may begin

¹Reprinted from *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* by Norman Maclean by permission of The University of Chicago Press. ©1976 by The University of Chicago.

discussing the content of the pieces. Discussion reinforces the students' perceptions that what is omitted from the first sentence is the subject of the whole piece.

For visual convenience, the discussions of omitted information are set in separate paragraphs. But discovery follows effort and frustration, the components of every good puzzle. Withhold your discussion until the pattern of omissions has been discovered.

Example 1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.—Genesis.
(May & Metzger, 1973)²

When is obvious, as is Who. What is not just the heavens and the earth (they are Where, appearing *ex nihilo*) but the event indicated by “created the heavens and the earth.”

How and Why are missing. Genesis's first chapter explains How God created the cosmos in two ways: (1) with the single, powerful word (!) “Fiat,” “let be;” and (2) in a certain order—these on the first day, those on the next. Why is the sticky question that creates theology and religion.

Example 2

They're out there. (Kesey, 1962, p. 9)³

A simple contraction provides When: we “are” in the present. Who is the subject of the sentence, and Where is “out there.” But Kesey demonstrates another first sentence technique—ambiguity. The sentence provides only vague information, teasing the reader on.

What, Why, and How are missing. The primary purpose of fiction is to tell What happens next. Kesey's excellent novel tells What happened to put Who Where. But the opening sentence's ambiguity leaves room for the implication that if “they” are “out,” “we” are “in.” *We* is both the narrator and the reader. In fact, this ambiguity is important to the novel, since Kesey is examining whether the sane people are in or out of mental institutions. In the telling of What happens, Kesey explains How and Why they/we are out/in there/here.

²From the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, ©1971, 1973.

³Reprinted from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey with permission of Viking Press, ©1962 by Ken Kesey.

Example 3

It is not easy to write a familiar style. (Hazlitt, 1822, p. 123)

What is the event of writing a familiar style. How is the difficulty of performing the What.

Who, Where, and Why are missing. Since Hazlitt's intent is to defend familiar style, and since Hazlitt is the writer, Who is probably Hazlitt (as the sentence implies). But Who is also any writer interested in the familiar style. Where is never discussed because the writer, using English, assumes we are in the English-speaking world. Why is of course an explanation of How's difficulty and the chief question raised by Hazlitt's opener.

By now, this labeling of the five Ws & H may resemble sentence diagramming. Be careful to reinforce with the students that the five Ws & H may coincide with the parts of a sentence, but the coinciding parts are not identical. For instance, in Hazlitt's opener it is tempting to label "a familiar style" as How, since that phrase modifies the infinitive "to write;" but the whole event is a What—not just writing, but writing a familiar style. Another example is the first sentence in Genesis: God does not just create, he creates the heavens and the earth.

Inductively, the students should have discovered the pattern of omissions. If by now they have also begun developing the connections between the sentences' omissions and the prose pieces' subjects, you may want to point out that a principle formed inductively can be applied deductively. For instance, in solving the Hazlitt opener, listing the obvious omissions *first* might help narrow the choices of what is included. Since there is no Who in Hazlitt's sentence, the students are more likely to realize that What is not always the sentence's verb, as in Genesis, but may be the sentence's subject.

Example 4 is a complicated introductory sentence:

Example 4

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. (Orwell, 1954, p. 154)⁴

Where and When are obvious: a town in Burma and a time in Orwell's life. What is hatred. But who is Who?

The first person point of view (see "Choosing a Point of View" below) and the syntax ("I" as subject of the sentence) seem to indicate that "I" is the Who. But

⁴Excerpts from "Shooting an Elephant" in *Shooting an elephant and other essays* by George Orwell are reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.; copyright 1950 by Sonia Brownell Orwell, renewed 1978 by Sonia Pitt-Rivers.

what about “people?” Both can be the Who if we follow the definition (see above) of Who—“people involved.” A newspaper story might begin “Joe Jones was murdered by a gang,” and in that story both Joe Jones and the gang would be Who. Confusion over Who comes from the sentence’s passive verb and its echo, “happen to me.” “Large numbers of people” are acting on the essay’s narrator. This confusion is intentional, as we shall see.

How and Why are missing. Orwell intends to make the abstract point that imperialism as a form of oppression destroys the freedom of both perpetrator and victim. This abstraction is concretely demonstrated by the effect of hatred—a manifestation of imperialism—on its victims, both “large numbers of people” and the narrator. Orwell sympathizes with the Burmese, yet they hate him for being an oppressor, and he returns their hatred. These divided emotions cause his confusion. As a writer, Orwell presents this confusion by making himself and his victims equally important Who’s. By the essay’s end, readers will see How hatred by Who (“people”) forces Who (“I”) to shoot the elephant mentioned in the title (see “Attracting Readers with Titles” below) as an expression of hatred.

Choosing a Point of View

Point of view (POV) is the relation of the narrator to the event and is a vital piece of information that should be provided in the first sentence. POV is either implied or stated and usually is in the first or third person.

The first person creates reader identification. The reader participates in the action by reading/hearing the word “I” as if it means “me.” The third person is detached and objective. It pushes readers into an audience where they watch the action. The Genesis opener (Example 1 above) is a classic example of the third person. But, some openers do not state POV.

In Example 2 above (“They’re out there”), Kesey implies a POV by suggesting an antithetical parallelism: if “they” are out . . . “we” are in. Kesey implies a first person plural point of view. Kesey’s story is told in the first person (though singular, not plural). However, implying POV delays information dangerously. The reader will assume that the apparent POV is correct and will be quite unhappy if that assumption proves wrong.

Danger.

1. *Do not delay or abruptly shift POV information.* Remember that readers want a reason to quit reading. Vegetating before a TV is easier than reading. Comic strips are funnier than essays, and movie magazines are more titillating than Orwell. Settle the readers into a POV as quickly as possible by providing all the vital information immediately. A jarring POV shift in the second sentence will lose reader interest.

2. *Avoid the first person POV when discussing outrageous subjects or actions.* I, the reader, will never believe that “I created the heavens and the earth.” Outrageous subjects include attitudes abhorrent to the reader. A South African supporter of apartheid will not identify with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.
3. *Avoid the first person POV when withholding information.* Readers read a first person POV as if they were telling themselves the story. It is not possible to withhold from one’s self knowledge of one’s own actions. Had Orwell not stated first in his title (see below) that “I” was shooting an elephant, I would not believe myself when it came time to shoot. This is a credibility question, just as it is in “I am suddenly killed by a meteor,” I, the reader, am not dead; I am throwing away the story.

Ordinarily, writers select a POV in the first sentence of their first draft. Knowing in the prewriting stage that they will discuss an outrageous subject or withhold information, writers can avoid the dangers above. However, beginning writers using the first person often discover while writing that their climactic action or scene or point is also withheld information (as in Danger 3 above). More often, beginning writers discover that full understanding of an event demands more information than a first person narrator can possess (for example, information known by others or passed to the narrator later). At these times, writers have few alternatives but to change the POV on revision. The frequency of these difficulties makes it wise to recommend that, during revision, students check the consonance of their POV with their information.

Attracting Readers with Titles

Titles are the first words a reader sees. They present an author’s attitude and approach that decide the reader’s interest.

Orwell uses his title, “Shooting an Elephant,” to attract readers as well as to avoid Danger 2 above. Titles work synergistically with opening sentences. Separately, each draws reader attention, but together they create a much more intriguing question. How does “hatred” involve “shooting an elephant?” Orwell would have lost substantial readership with a title stating his point: “Imperialism is Deleterious to Perpetrators and Victims: One Example from Burma under the English Empire.”

Ideally, but not always, a title presents the author’s attitude and approach. The Declaration of Independence, *The Politics of God* (Washington, 1967), and “The Trouble with Slogans” (Sorenson, 1980) are good examples.

If titles do not display attitude and approach, assume the author has mixed feelings about the subject. “Shooting an Elephant” and “On Familiar Style,” for example, offer only an interesting event and a controversial subject (in 1822), respectively.

Danger.

1. *Do not use codeworded titles.* Unless you are writing to a special audience, one that already agrees with what you have to say, codeworded titles reduce your readership. Those who agree don't need to agree again; those who disagree won't want to read. Examples: Male chauvinists won't read "Without the Help of a Man." Liberals won't read "The Right is Right." Neither will conservatives. However, sometimes you can turn codewords around and gain general readership, for example, "E.R.A.—R.I.P." (Hacker, 1980).
2. *Avoid static titles.* "Imperialism," "Ice Hockey," and "The Three Branches of American Government" are not only boring titles, they don't *act*. Very few people will read the schematics these titles suggest. If you cannot slip an acting word into the title (e.g. "shooting"), use words that suggest action—for example, "politics" with its wheelings and dealings or "trouble" with its sense of unrest.

Starting at the Best Point

Prose starts at one of three points in the discussion—the beginning, middle, or end. The choice of starting point is strategic to structuring the essay and to stimulating curiosity. The title or opening sentence—sometimes both together—reveal the starting point.

Which starting point is best? That is a first draft decision, perhaps a prewriting decision. Because a beginning points to its end, the starting point determines where the emphasis will lie, how the essay will end, and what the significance of the essay is.

But, during revision, writers may discover that their own or the reader's interest requires reorganizing the essay. Or, they may discover that the true subject of their essay requires more emphasis, which requires reorganizing. (See "Finding Your Subject" and "Shaping Your Subject" in Chapter 13, "Revision.")

Here are some forms of organization and their implications:

Example 1—Begin at the Beginning

Genesis begins at the beginning, which is by far the most comfortable place for neophyte writers. The opening phrase, "in the beginning," clues the reader to a chronology. Since the Bible is, in one sense, a history of the Hebrews, chronology is the most effective order. But Genesis also demonstrates an important rule for writers.

Danger. *The most unlikely incident must appear first.* Once readers see Yahweh create *ex nihilo*, they will believe God can intervene at will in human history.

But if God appeared only after the world, civilization, and the Babylonian Empire were established, no reader would believe it. Belated claims are always doubtful. Similarly, the sentence following Orwell's opener (see Example 4 in the previous section) states, "I was a sub-divisional police officer." He places himself in Burma as an imperialist oppressor almost immediately, not stating until the second paragraph that he thinks imperialism is an "evil thing." By presenting his most unlikely employment first, he preempts the question of why he is there if he disapproves of imperialism.

Example 2—Begin in the Middle

Kesey's beginning places us in the immediate present. "They're out there" tells us something has gone on before and we have some catching up to do. This beginning is said to be *in medias res*, in the middle of things. This is a more interesting beginning than Example 1 because it is more unusual.

Danger. *Regardless of beginning point, present the discussion in its proper order.* For instance, when beginning in the middle, follow this order:

2. Socrates is a man.
1. All men are mortal.
3. Socrates is mortal.

Otherwise, the significance of the discussion is altered (see Example 4).

Example 3—Begin with a Purpose

The beginning chosen by Hazlitt (see Example 3 in the previous section) dispenses with chronology, which is less important to his design. He begins instead by stating a purpose (to write in a familiar style) and an enticement to participate (why isn't this style "easy"?). We might assume that this purpose will begin by acquainting us with itself, and Hazlitt satisfies our assumption by providing an extended definition of familiar style.

Example 4—Begin at the End

Orwell's title, "Shooting an Elephant," alerts us to the unusual incident at the essay's climax and combines with his opening sentence to place us some time after the event ("the only time in my life"). Because Orwell writes with a first person point of view, readers identify strongly with the narrator; Orwell's "I" becomes a kind of "we." This POV combines with our knowledge that the shooting has already happened to make the essay almost a meditation. Because *we* are thinking about it, we know the event means something (the Why of the story). To discover the Why, we must retell ourselves the How of shooting an elephant. So beginning at the end stimulates curiosity by asking, in essence, "How did that ever happen?"

Danger. *When beginning at the end, return to the end.* Thus:

3. Socrates is mortal.
1. All men are mortal.
2. Socrates is a man.
3. Socrates is mortal.

If you do not return—at least by implication—to Socrates’s mortality, the apparent significance of the story is Socrates’s humanity.

Evaluating Student Assignments

Assignments can either initiate or reinforce this chapter’s subject. As an initiating assignment, you might have your students write their own examples, then ask them whether the titles and first sentences work, and why. As reinforcement, you might open your workshop session by asking students to read their titles and first sentences, and then follow up by asking if and why they work.

In either case, ask the other students to tell how they imagine the story will continue after the title and first two sentences of each example. (You may want to use the check list of questions in the conclusion section.) This imagining validates the student authors’ sense of how well they have communicated their subjects to readers.

Whether you use the assignment as initiation or reinforcement, remember to be evenhanded in your expectations and treatment. The ethos of a place (your workshop) is created by its characters.

Student Sample 1

The Sky, What Does It Hold for Us?

The sky has been said to hold God and all the angels, the secret of the universe, and the future of man. But what does it hold for us?

This title works by using a verb that suggests containment by an open space: action and paradox. A questioning title implies author uncertainty and promises an essay in which an answer will be tentatively worked out—a risky maneuver unless the question is momentous or particularly intriguing. The title, ambivalent as it is, generates curiosity.

The opening sentence is tricky and promising, which is just its problem. Who is implied by the passive “has been said” to be “people in general.” What is the holding of everything. (The passive verb might appear to be the event, or What; but, as in Orwell’s opener, it is only the clue to Who.) When is stated and indicates a summation of all past time. Where is the sky. How and Why are missing.

This beginning is a mess, a *charming* mess. The charm lies in the promise of something even grander than God, all the angels, the secret of the universe, and the future of man; and that charm is its problem. Nothing can happen next. The writer cannot follow up such grandeur. “Us” (the Who) does not compare with all that grandeur, and the second sentence merely restates the title. POV is still only implied in the second sentence, so we do not know who is talking. And because we cannot imagine what the writer might compare to such grandeur, we have no idea how the author feels about the subject, nor do we know where in the discussion the author is beginning the presentation.

Student Sample 2

Paper Planes

The annual paper airplane contest starts next week, and this year I’m going to win. I’ve got to win even if it means sabotaging Ralph’s plane.

Here the title contributes nothing immediate. Creative and cooperative readers might envision a paper airplane floating, but without a context, the title contributes no author attitude or approach. Only those interested in the subject will read on.

The first sentence provides What, When, and Who. We imagine that I/we (Who) will work to win the contest (What). Whether we want to read on is determined by our predisposition toward paper airplanes, the only aid the title provides to curiosity. How and Why are missing.

The second sentence provides How (“sabotage”) and some of Why (“I’ve got to”). If we read as far as the second sentence, it is likely that we will read to the end. For, at this point, the author has tickled our curiosity. We want to read on, as we do not in the next example, which is not only riddled with errors, but boring.

Student Sample 3

Why Do Sidewalks Have Tar in Them Every Ten Feet

The reason concrete in them is because they expand when it gets hot. The tar keeps the concrete from expanding so it won’t crack.

Here the answer to the title’s question can only be guessed from the first sentence. The answer is expanded in the second sentence, and nobody cares except civil engineers. We intuit from the title that this author will go on as long as required and say nothing intriguing, nothing interesting, nothing we have not already guessed. The errors are probably the result of the author’s own boredom. Ho hum.

CONCLUSION

Return to the discussion in this chapter whenever your students lose their sense of audience or subject. A passing discussion of titles and beginnings focuses many a workshop confused by incoherent essays. Occasional analysis of a beginning with the following points in mind will help:

1. What will happen next?

- Which of the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How forms are missing?
- Where in the sequence of discussion does the essay begin?

2. Who's talking?

- What is the point of view?
- Can the narrator believably possess all the information in the essay?

3. How does the author/narrator feel about the subject?

- What attitude and approach does the title suggest?
- Does the title work with the first sentence to present the author's approach and attitude?

4. Do you want to read on?

- Is the declared subject in title and opener the true subject?
- Do Points 1, 2, and 3 above work to stimulate curiosity?

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Chapter 6
Words

Objectives

1. to introduce sounds of words and their importance to prose writing
2. to demonstrate the necessity to choose specific verbs to convey an intended meaning
3. to demonstrate that adverbs and weak verbs are less effective than one strong verb

6

FOR THE TEACHER

A class that is dedicated to the celebration of the written word can be a memorable experience for the beginning writer. Words are tools for shaping ideas, and a “Wonderful Word Day” can provide the occasion for students to discover the important contribution this singular element of language gives to lucid communication. Even though a wealth of vocabulary is at the disposal of all students, seldom do they take full advantage of that wealth to consider deliberately in their first essays the choice of the precise word that conveys the information and tone they intend to express. The result is often everyday, timid prose and essays that are bereft of the full variety and nuance of the language they might contain.

One important factor that contributes to the neglect of the word by students is their failure to have before them a demanding and discriminating reader. Having written most of their assignments either for themselves—rather prejudicial readers—or for their teacher—a sometimes overworked person who can assume a generic personality over the years, merely assigning grades and not needing to be entertained by writing—students seldom encounter a critical audience. The workshop format (see Chapter 11 “How a Workshop Works”) advocated in this volume demands that students write for discriminating readers—their fellow students. They must continuously engage their fellow students, keeping in mind the varied likes and dislikes of the class as exhibited by past workshop experiences. As soon as they develop a responsibility to a responsive audience (beginning in the workshop), the students can anticipate a variety of reactions to their compositions and can begin to write more deliberately and with greater attention to the selection of individual words.

The first step in teaching this type of deliberate writing is for the teacher to insist that, when the students sit down to write, they remember that an audience is always present, though for the moment, only in their minds. The students must keep in mind that this “delayed” audience will not profit in understanding by the writer’s use of intonation or nonverbal cues while writing. The author cannot always be present to act as interpreter for the reader. A writer’s deliberate choice of words is the most faithful means of communicating intended meaning.

Chapter 2, “Throwing the Eraser,” is a good example of the need for writers to deliberate carefully about the choice of the written word until it accurately reflects the intended interpretation of an event. “Ben threw the eraser” as a spoken sentence is only one aspect of a communication. The listener imagines the body movements and hears the voice inflection, both elements contributing to a vivid picture of how the verb “threw” is to be interpreted. When the sentence, “Ben threw the eraser,” is written, the picture of the action is vague. “Threw” we consider a “flat” verb. It transmits specific information neither of content nor mood. Words with richer connotations should be used to describe the specific action. “Tossed” or “hurled,” for example, are more specific in conveying content and mood. “Tossed” implies a gentle action, and the sound of the word imitates the action. The word literally lifts up in the air with the double “s” sound and then falls back down to the “ed.”

Instruction that celebrates the word encourages students to maximize the potentialities and dynamics of language. Such instruction can last one class period or five. Searching for the most precise word can become an exciting adventure for students; they discover that each word has its own shape, texture, and content.

The activities in this chapter follow naturally from Chapter 1, “Molly and Ned,” because they “unfix” vocabulary by forcing students to investigate various dimensions of individual words. They are asked to sing vowels, enunciate sentences, and act out words. The practice of writing thus becomes active, resulting in essays that are engaging in both part and whole. In addition, by exploring the various connotations of words in a workshop format, the students test and expand their individual linguistic abilities. Each student’s understanding of a word’s tone, shape, and texture—determined by both individual and cultural experience—is brought into the activities of the class. That is to say, students discover how words help create context, as discussed in Chapter 2, “Throwing the Eraser.”

EXERCISES

Activities

Exercise 1—Singing Vowels

This is a short warm-up exercise that can be part of a “Wonderful Word Day.” It enables students to hear vowel sounds isolated from words. In unison, have the

class sing each vowel sound while listening carefully for a mood contained in the vowel. Mood is defined as an emotion that is evoked by the sound. For example, the long ø (ō) sound may be considered as a long, slow sound; a lower note than other vowels. The mood evoked is one of calmness and steadiness (of course, each student's interpretation of a particular sound will depend upon individual and cultural contexts). As a next step, the students can suggest words that contain that vowel sound and also express the intended mood.

Exercise 2—Shapes of Words

This is another warm-up exercise. In referring to individual words, challenge the students to suggest what they would consider “fat” words (e.g., alarm), “skinny” words (e.g., scissor), “liquid” words (e.g., violet, lily), “rough” words (e.g., grate), and so on. A lively discussion will ensue as the students attempt to define a “fat,” “skinny,” “liquid,” or “rough” word.

Constantly listening to sound rather than content may be difficult for students at first—it challenges their “functional fixedness”—but soon the activity will become a natural part of the writing process.

Exercise 3—Singing Sentences

Finally, as a warm-up exercise, it is appropriate for students to react to the sounds suggested in elements of language that are larger than a vowel or an individual word. To initiate such a discussion, have the actors or actresses in the class volunteer to sing or enunciate clearly and dramatically the following descriptive sentences:

- She plucked out her lashes and flipped them into the sink, her tweezers clicking merrily.
- He heard the slow tug of the surf, the steady hum growing closer to his home.
- The bus driver turned toward her empty bus and climbed up into it, her thick thighs sturdy in her trousers, the sway of her hips sharp and heavy in the afternoon light.
- Falling away, the rain, silently disappearing, was becoming a myriad of my own small triumphs, drops forming and unforming on the windows.

Exercise 4—Synonyms

Begin this exercise by writing ten simple verbs across the top of the chalkboard—walk, run, hit, dance, laugh, cry, shout, climb, fall, throw—so that each word is a heading for a column. Draw lines to separate the ten columns. Call upon the students to suggest ten synonyms for each verb. Of course, this assignment could be done before class by each student, with the additional requirement that as

many synonyms be listed as possible. The more synonyms you require, the more students are challenged to encounter new words. In class you would only require that selected students write their top ten synonyms on the board.

When the board is filled with ten synonyms for each major verb, ask for a volunteer to come to the front of the room and choose a synonym to act out in pantomime. The student is permitted to tell the class in which column the word is located but not the word itself. For example, Sarah would point to the “walk” column and then “saunter” across the room. Students would raise their hands and guess which verb in the column she was imitating. If no guesses were correct or if there were more than one answer (usually each guess is adamantly defended), Sarah would act out the same word again, and the class would vote to achieve a consensus of opinion.

After each student has had a chance to act out a word, general reflections about sounds and the selection of a correct word from the synonyms can begin. Looking, for example, at related words such as “stroll” and “sidle,” you might ask the students if there is a relationship between the two words’ sounds and their potential to convey accurately an intended action. For example, “stroll” may represent a happy and relaxing walk, whereas “sidle” might suggest a more furtive, suspicious gait. On the basis of your tentative suggestions, ask the students if there are any important differences in the sounds of the words that might contribute to one word being more appropriate than another for an intended meaning. Referring back to the warm-up exercises (Exercises 1, 2, and 3), the students might pursue a mood analysis by listening to the vowel sounds in each word, when applicable. For example, the long o in “stroll” suggests a calm lingering, a fullness, whereas the long i in “sidle” suggests the cunning and deceit of “sly,” and the falling rhythm of the unaccented syllable at the end speeds up the movement of the word.

Another common way to reinforce an inexperienced writer’s ability to select the verb that conveys the most meaning is to attach adverbs to the simple verbs that stand at the head of each column on the board. For example, to “walk” we might attach “lazily” to form “walked lazily.” Here an adverb comes in at the last minute to describe “how” a person walks. The act of attaching adverbs to simple verbs after the students have been busily acting out synonyms is often such a disappointment to the students that they consciously seek more precise, descriptive words rather than remain satisfied with what they begin to call “weak, colorless” words. They discover for themselves that attaching an adverb to a weak verb is not nearly as effective as finding a more precise single word. Using two words to do the job of one stretches out the image and diminishes the intensity of the action.

In short, verbs can give us a concrete picture of both action and mood if we choose them carefully. The verbs that originally headed each column—walk, run, laugh, cry, and so on—have in our classes been referred to not only as “weak” but as boring. Thus the two rules that we can derive from our “synonyms” exercises are:

1. Do not use boring verbs.
2. Avoid adverbs as a way of “pumping up” weak, boring verbs.

POSTASSIGNMENT

To practice using specific verbs, the following paragraph-with-the-verbs-left-out exercise provides a fun, “mad-lib” exercise. The only directions are for the students to substitute the names of their fellow students and teacher for the names already in the exercise and then to fill in the blanks with energetic verbs from the lists already on the board. This exercise will not only generate many laughs as students read their results out loud; but also, as they defend their choice of words, their inclination to use specific verbs to convey exactly what they intend will be sharpened.

Exiting the Writing Class

At 3:30, Writing Skills breaks for the day and the real fun begins. The door flies open and 12 shy students _____ out. Jennifer, wanting to be the first one out, _____ over Marc, who _____ to the floor _____ing. Wasting no time, Tony and Virginia _____ across his stomach with Betsy _____ing close behind. Jim loses patience and rolls to the corner _____ing. _____ing her head against the blackboard because she forgot her coke machine money, Sue complains that this is not her day. Ricky, absorbed in the excitement, _____ Kendra out the window while she is busy explaining to parents that this is a healthy activity. Lisa can't stand it any more and _____ on top of Ashu's shoulders in an attempt to escape through the transom. A sudden _____ing from the back of the room, a blast of blue smoke, and Bill and Ken go _____ing off on their motorcycle _____ing, These are strange people!

Chapter 7

Sentences

Objectives

1. to show that a sentence is one clear picture or idea
2. to compose the clearest sentences with specific words
3. to sequence information properly, creating the most effective sentence
4. to discover that a sentence's form imitates content

7

FOR THE TEACHER

E.B. White advises us that:

Muddiness is not merely a disturber of prose, it is also a destroyer of life, of hope; death on the highway caused by a badly worded road sign, heartbreak among lovers caused by a misplaced phrase in a well-intentioned letter, anguish of a traveler expecting to be met at a railroad station and not being met because of a slipshod telegram. . . . When you say something, make sure you have said it. The chances of your having said it are only fair. (Strunk & White, 1979, pp. 79–80)

This chapter seeks to improve the chances that neophyte writers will say something in their revisions. But only in revisions. If, in first drafts, students concentrate on all the ideas presented in this chapter, they may never write beyond the introductory sentence. Inexperienced writers should get thoughts on paper first, and then revise for perfection. Thus, this chapter's classroom exercise focuses on revision skills.

The exercise is simple. Examples of well-written sentences are put on the board. The sentences' techniques are discussed; then the group uses those techniques to revise student sentences.

Revising student sentences consumes most of the time in this exercise. This results from the group's frustration at divining a sentence's intended meaning and searching for a diction and syntax that clearly conveys that meaning. The group's frustration stems from two problems.

The first problem is that a sentence contains only one picture or idea, but that one picture or idea may subsume a sequence of pictures or ideas. Analogously, one computer program can contain several subprograms. And just as a computer program must execute its subprograms in proper sequence, a sentence must present its component pictures or ideas in proper sequence. Often, student sentences present more than one idea in illogical sequences, and this makes it difficult to divine the writer's intended meaning.

The second problem is that a sentence's content cannot be divorced from its form. Form means grammatical structure, diction, syllabification, assonance and alliteration, parallelism, and the like. Form provides instructions as to how a reader should proceed through a sentence, just as curbing, white lines, traffic signs, and distances between cars tell a driver how to proceed down a street. The visual and aural aspects of a sentence are as important as its content.

The frustration of revising student sentences and the time spent on that revision will help the group break out of its functionally fixed attitude toward sentences. Just as Chapter 1, "Molly and Ned," demonstrates that there is more to a word than meaning/content, this chapter demonstrates that there is more to a sentence than either content or form. In fact, the point of this chapter is to show that a sentence is *both* content and form. The interaction of content and form is called organic form.

EXERCISES

Discovering Organic Form

The best way to demonstrate organic form is to write on the blackboard a sentence that few students will be able to understand. Consider the following example:

Example 1

Omnis cellula a cellula.

Ask the students to guess from the sentence's sound what it means. At this stage, sound is important. The end syllable of each word drops in volume and tends to slur into the first syllable of the following word. Thus, the final syllable of the first "cellula" slurs into "a," which almost fades into the second "cellula." Both metrically and phonetically, the words set up a feeling of repetition.

The Latin phrase is Rudolf Virchow's formulation of the doctrine of pathological generation: "All cells come from (preexisting) cells" (Virchow, 1968). One cell creates more cells, which create more cells. The form of the sentence—its metric, phonetic, and visual repetitions—replicates the content of the sentence.

This is organic form, which can be defined as “form imitates content.” Or, as Brooks and Warren (1979a) put it, there is a “close relation of function as planned and purposed and form as the articulation and manifestation of that purpose” (p. 15). “Function” here is essentially synonymous with “content.”

But the interaction between form and content is also recursive. Brooks and Warren (1979b) write: “In the process of putting ideas into words, the words themselves tend to generate new ideas, and so the function intended may be constantly modified in the very act of embodying it in a form” (p. 39). Content is changed by form, yet form imitates content. For this reason, student writers should not worry too much about form until the first draft is finished (see the “For the Teacher” section in Chapter 13, “Revision”). But note that *even during revision*, form will continue to modify content, even though writers have more control over their form in that stage of composition. In the next section, we present some examples of controlled writing.

Exploring the Well-Written Sentence

The discussion of form and content in the example sentences below is not exhaustive. However, the basic techniques apply to all sentences. Once the group has explored these techniques, it should have a sense of methodology, of how to approach the next section on revising for effective sentences. In that section, the students may begin raising more considerations of both form and content.

As shown in the following example, the easiest sentence to analyze on a blackboard is also the shortest of our example sentences.

Example 2

Knowledge is power.—Francis Bacon

Here “is” works as an equal sign for content. Bacon defines one abstract idea by equating it with another. It might be argued that Bacon also *refines* knowledge by equating it with power, but the important point here is that one idea or object can be explained by another.

The sentence’s form contributes to this equation by creating syllabic balance. Two words of two syllables each are connected by a linking verb. The sentence has the rhythm of an equation, and the rhythm reinforces content. Phonetically, the vowel sounds are nearly alike and are in the same order. Visually, the smallest word links the two larger ones, as does the “a” in “cellula a cellula.” In Bacon’s sentence, form replicates content by suggesting an equation.

In the next example, the verb operates in only one direction, like the symbol for “yields” in a chemical reaction (\rightarrow). Hilbert Shin, a student writer, composed this sentence in an essay describing his classroom.

Example 3

A totally white room implies an insane asylum cell.

The content is clear. The form's most notable contributions to content are visual and rhythmic. Visually, two four-word phrases are connected by the verb "implies." The two phrases are congruent in structure (an article, two modifiers, and a noun).

Rhythmically, the first phrase has six syllables, the second phrase has seven. Shin could have ended the sentence with "an insane asylum" and maintained a syllabic balance, but the sentence would have looked unbalanced (four words vs. three words), and the reader's image would have been of a building, not one room. The extra syllable of "cell" maintains the visual balance of four elements to four elements *and* the image balance of room to cell. Most important, the accented extra syllable provides a sense of conclusion and emphasis.

Similarly, in the following example, the sentence places the emphatic word at its end. In this case, though, student writer Scott Klebe uses that emphatic position for the humor of contrast.

Example 4

Woe comes to he who correctly diagnoses that an athletically gifted person writes like an illiterate, for it is likely that later on he will be thoughtfully chastened with a fist.

Inflated diction is the most notable aspect of this sentence's form. Humor, because it relies on unexpected juxtaposition, is one of the few types of writing in which form can imitate content by contrasting with it. For example, Klebe could have written, "If you call a jock dumb, he'll hit you," but the humor would have been lost. Klebe's humor rests entirely on his uneven diction, on contrasting polysyllabic and abstract words with a one-syllable and too, too real "fist." This kind of writing resembles Heywood Hale Broun's use of high-flown words to describe the sweat and grunt of sports.

Students will see how Klebe's sentence creates humor, but they may not recognize problems arising from unintentionally uneven diction.

Danger. *In serious writing, avoid contrasting form with content.* Diction and verbosity, for instance, can make an unintentional joke of content, as in the following student sentence, complete with misspellings:

With this, you have an unexhaustable surge of power at your own command: being able to apply word usage well.

The next example, in which Woody Allen (1975) describes dinner at the court of the farcical Louis the Fat, also relies on the humor of contrast.

Example 5

A typical dinner (according to DeRochet) consisted of a thin crepe appetizer, some parsley, an ox, and custard. (p. 98)¹

Here, Allen turns the idea of organic form back on itself. Inserting the ox in a conventional list of food images creates a contrast that asks, “What’s wrong with this picture?” But the genius of Allen’s sentence lies in the contrast of form—a two-letter word represents the largest item on the menu. The form contrasts with itself!

Revising for Effective Sentences

The example sentences above demonstrate organic form, the interaction of content and structure. But recognizing organic form in a well-written sentence is not the same as writing or rewriting a sentence. The exercise presented in this section demonstrates how to revise sentences for organic form. By actively involving a class in on-the-blackboard revising, a teacher demonstrates to an individual writer how to carry the process back to the writer’s own essay.

Revising—whether of sentences, paragraphs, or essays—is like the delicate process that cookbooks call “adjusting the seasoning;” adding a dash of this requires adding a pinch of that, which demands a bit more of something else. Very lucky or very gifted cooks and writers turn out perfect dishes or essays, but everyone else must settle for what only approaches perfection.

But, to reiterate the point made in the Introduction, frustration is important to student discovery and retention; students value what they discover on their own, which is why they remember it. This exercise demonstrates to student writers the “muddiness” disturbing their prose.

Like many writers, students may not enjoy having their own work analyzed. But if the group begins this exercise with the assumption that almost nothing is perfect and with the knowledge that, sooner or later, each student’s writing will be publicly appraised for successes and failures, then the appropriate atmosphere has been established (see also Chapter 11, “How a Workshop Works”). The appropriate atmosphere carries this (sometimes tacit) message: “We want to understand what the writer *intended* to say, and we want to find ways to make the intended meaning clearer.” Though ordinarily the sentences are presented anonymously, most students acknowledge authorship and plunge into group revision.

Because the threshold of frustration is easily crossed during this exercise, it is best to begin with a published sample. The group need not revise this sample, but proof that even professionals have bad days will improve the students’ attitudes.

¹Reprinted from *Without Feathers* by Woody Allen with permission of Random House, © 1975.

Revision Sample 1

Where law comes clothed in the language of high moral purpose, it requires some hardheadedness to see that behind every law, however unanimous the consent of its subjects, stands the policeman's night stick. (Thernstrom, 1960, p. 47)

Students may not immediately perceive the chief difficulty in this sentence, since the intended meaning is pretty clear. But if the instructor illustrates some of the phrases on the blackboard, the problem of form becomes clear. Draw a minister's collar for "clothed in the language of high moral purpose," a hardhat for "hardheadedness," and a night stick standing on two legs behind the minister's collar. Visually, the sentence requires the hardhat to run around the collar where the night stick will jump up and beat it. Thernstrom's sentence, as accurate as its meaning may be, visualizes into a joke.

Danger.

1. *Avoid more than one metaphor in each sentence.* This is otherwise known as "mixing metaphors." A closer look at Thernstrom's phrase, "clothed in the language of high moral purpose," might call for wearing fabric imprinted with a prayer or the Declaration of Independence.
2. *Avoid metaphorical verbs that conflict with metaphorical images.* The verb "stands" in Thernstrom's sentence personifies "policeman's night stick" ludicrously. If the author intended the night stick as a synecdoche—a figure of speech in which a part represents a whole or vice versa—more appropriate verbs might have been "waits" or "twirls." Readers supply the policeman behind a twirling night stick. Students must understand that many verbs relate to bodily actions and have the potential to create mixed metaphors. For instance, "wave" as a verb means to move something up and down, and it is possible that a night stick might wave. But waving is also something done with the hands, and it is improbable that a waving night stick will grow hands.

The next sentence also contains mixed metaphors. Its intent is clear, and, because its idea is less complex, it is a good one to use to begin revising.

Revision Sample 2

The split of the grade in this way was by no means unbridgeable, but it was a limiting factor on my social horizons.

The sentence's content indicates that, though the class was halved, the author found it possible to socialize with some, but not all, of the people in the other half. As the abstractions in Revision Sample 1 indicate, this student author was wise to make concrete and visual images by use of metaphor. Unfortunately, the metaphors are mixed, and the sentence also suffers from verbosity and uneven diction.

Where to start revising? A good method is to "omit needless words" (Strunk & White, 1979, p. 23), making minor adjustments as form requires.

The phrase "in this way" implies that the author has explained in the previous sentence how the class was divided and that there *is* a class. Thus, "of the grade" is also expendable. Should students not recognize needless words immediately, the instructor might ask where the subject of the sentence is. Similarly, "factor" refers to "it," which refers to "this split;" factor is redundant. Finally, at small cost to meaning, the "a" and the "was" in the second half of the sentence can be deleted. Thus:

This split was by no means unbridgeable, but it limited my social horizons.

Students will probably note that most of the uneven diction has disappeared, though "split" and "limited" contrast their abstractions with the concrete picture of bridge and horizon. "Unbridgeable" is simply an ugly and awkward word. But with the fat cut away, the meat of the sentence now awaits the cook.

The next decisions are those that consume time. Like a chef with the base ingredient for two recipes, the class faces a revised sentence with two possible metaphors: bridge or horizon. The metaphors together will not draw one picture; the thin line of a horizon may bulge up with a bridge, but it cannot open down for a split simultaneously. Which metaphor will be most useful?

The grammatical subject of the sentence is "this split," the division of the class; and "division" implies a gap. Thus, the bridge metaphor seems more promising since it arises from the grammatical subject and is most closely related to the content of the sentence (socializing is difficult because of "this split"). This lucky coincidence is not always present, however.

Danger. *When revising first-draft sentences to eliminate mixed metaphors, choose the strongest metaphor.* The strongest metaphor is that which is most specific, most visual, and which has emotional connotations that reinforce the meaning of the sentence. (See also the "Defining Metaphor and Simile" section in Chapter 9, "Figures of Speech.") Thernstrom's metaphor, "policeman's nightstick," for example, is a solid, easily pictured object that connotes force and coercion. But "clothed in the language of high moral purpose" is fuzzier, less vivid, and connotes hypocrisy, which is not quite the intended meaning of the sentence.

But note that Thernstrom's strongest metaphor is quite distant from the sentence's grammatical subject ("*it* requires"). When revising, students must be willing to throw out fuzzy metaphors, no matter how dear, and to reorganize the sentence around the strongest metaphor, no matter where it appears.

Conveniently, in our Revision Sample 2, the fuzziest metaphor is "horizon." The group can now begin constructing a revised sentence using the idea of a bridge over a gap. Note the circumlocution of "by no means unbridgeable." The instructor might ask, "What happens if the sentence's verb arises from the metaphor?" These sentences might be suggested:

I bridged this split, but the bridge was narrow and often closed.
 I bridged this split socially, but the bridge was narrow and frail.
 I could bridge this gap socially, but not often.

None of these sentences is perfect, but each has the virtues of brevity and clarity at very small expense to meaning. The longest revised sentence has 12 words, whereas the original sentence has 23. Note that drawing an active verb from the metaphor is a more specific formulation of Rule 3 listed in the Introduction: "Stare at a fact long enough, and it'll move." (Or "facts act.") "Unbridgeable" becomes "bridged."

Revision Sample 2 typifies the time and difficulty involved in sentence revision, especially when individual students in a group dissent about diction. "Gap" or "chasm" or "gorge"?

Here is a sentence with ambiguous meaning:

Revision Sample 3

After having crushed toes and bruised ankles, you are finally at your table.

Whose toes were crushed? Yours ("you") or someone else's? Revision is fairly simple. If your toes were crushed, insert "your" and rearrange the phrase thusly: "after having your toes crushed and your ankles bruised." If you crushed someone else's toes, delete "having" and revise to "crushing toes and bruising ankles."

The above revision samples demonstrate the kind and depth of analysis groups must perform when revising. With this experience, the group can proceed to revising sentences that the instructor has gleaned from student papers. Allot the majority of class time to this revision, persisting with the exercise to the point of restiveness.

CONCLUSION

Students discover for themselves the strengths and weaknesses in their own sentences; and, because it is their discovery, they retain two general principles:

1. All writers' chances of having said what they meant are only fair.
2. Students can successfully revise sentences to raise their chances to fair.

Students also discover that each aspect of writing relates to every other aspect. As Brooks and Warren (1979a) say, "We need to look at the composition, not as an achieved organism, but as an organism in the process of being developed" (p. 15). Form does not separate from content, diction does not separate from metaphor, and proper sequencing of ideas does not separate from the use of active verbs.

Painstaking revision may initially intimidate students. But the instructor can reassure the group that, as in typing, repetition leads to mastery. And, just as a typist memorizes the keyboard, later forgetting which letters go to which keys, students who have mastered this chapter's revision techniques will begin writing better sentences in first drafts. At that stage, they need only listen for the editorial "whoops!" alarm, much as a typist intuits when the wrong key has been hit.

The following questions will help guide students in revising their own sentences and performing the student postassignment that follows:

1. What does the sentence intend to say?
 - Is this *one* idea or picture?
 - Are the components of the idea or picture properly sequenced?
 - Does the sentence say what it intends to?
2. Does the sentence use organic form?
 - When read aloud, does the sentence's sound help or hinder its meaning?
 - Is the diction (word choice) even throughout?
 - Are there too many metaphors?
 - Is the sentence verbose?

POSTASSIGNMENT

This assignment functions both as a reinforcement for the chapter and as a first introduction to tactical revision. The instructor distributes students' essays to different students, requiring (1) revision using the techniques discussed in this chapter and (2) one sentence summarizing the point of the essay.

The purpose of sentence revision is clear. The one-sentence summary (see Chapter 12, "Summarizing the Essay") helps the reviser by providing a concise statement that acts as a scale model from which to reconstruct a more complete essay. The summary helps the author of the original gauge how well the essay's point was made, and it helps both author and instructor estimate how well the revision harmonizes with the original intention. For instance, a summary will show whether a serious essay has been turned comic. (For further discussion of this assignment, see the section on strengthening your prose in Chapter 13, "Revision.")

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Chapter 8

Paragraphs

Objectives

1. to cause students to become more deliberate about paragraph writing
2. to help students apply what they already understand about paragraphs toward revision
3. to demonstrate the function of a paragraph as a complete unit

8

FOR THE TEACHER

Repeatedly, the PVGY writing staff has discovered that many students have considerable difficulty dealing with the paragraph in their first essay assignments. Initial problems concerned length and the related concept of separating ideas by a paragraph mosaic. Students construct either three-page essays with a dozen two-sentence paragraphs or massive one-paragraph statements.

The importance of controlling paragraph length comes clear, however, when students see their essays typed and presented in a compact visual form. Through this newly constructed image, they immediately perceive the danger of “over-paragraphed” or “underparagraphed” writing. And, after reading each typed essay out loud, they experience a major principle behind paragraphing—the simple need to consider the reader and to give the reader a rest. A series of two-sentence paragraphs in an essay gives the reader too many rests, resulting in choppiness; the long one-paragraph essay provides the reader no break at all, resulting in exhaustion. Once students have seen and read their typed essays, they are ready to perform this chapter’s exercises.

Of course, mastering the paragraph does not stop with an understanding of length. A myriad of elements constitutes good paragraph writing. When asked the definitions and/or functions of a paragraph, students intuit accurate ideas; they are aware, for example, that structure plays an important role here. The problem for many students lies in their inability to integrate their vague intuitions into their writing.

This chapter seeks to reinforce those intuitions while translating them into clear definitions and statements of function. Students can then apply this information to

the revision of their own writing. The discussions are confined exclusively to descriptive and narrative paragraphs, since these are the topics usually assigned to beginning writers.

Again, in our classes we have experienced a general vagueness among students about the definition and function of paragraphs—an imprecision that intrudes upon their ability to communicate ideas in a clear and distinct manner. Our objective, therefore, is to cause students to be more deliberate about paragraph writing.

In order to accomplish our goal, class time is divided into three sections:

1. an exercise on what paragraphs look like, which of course calls for creativity (here we introduce the concept of paragraph art)
2. a discussion of how a paragraph works, which aims at an analytic approach to the definitions and functions of a paragraph (here we introduce the concept of paragraph interior design)
3. a workshop for treating student paragraphs, which capitalizes upon revision.

EXERCISES

Paragraph Art

What is a paragraph?

“A box with the upper left-hand corner missing,” replies a voice from the back of the room.

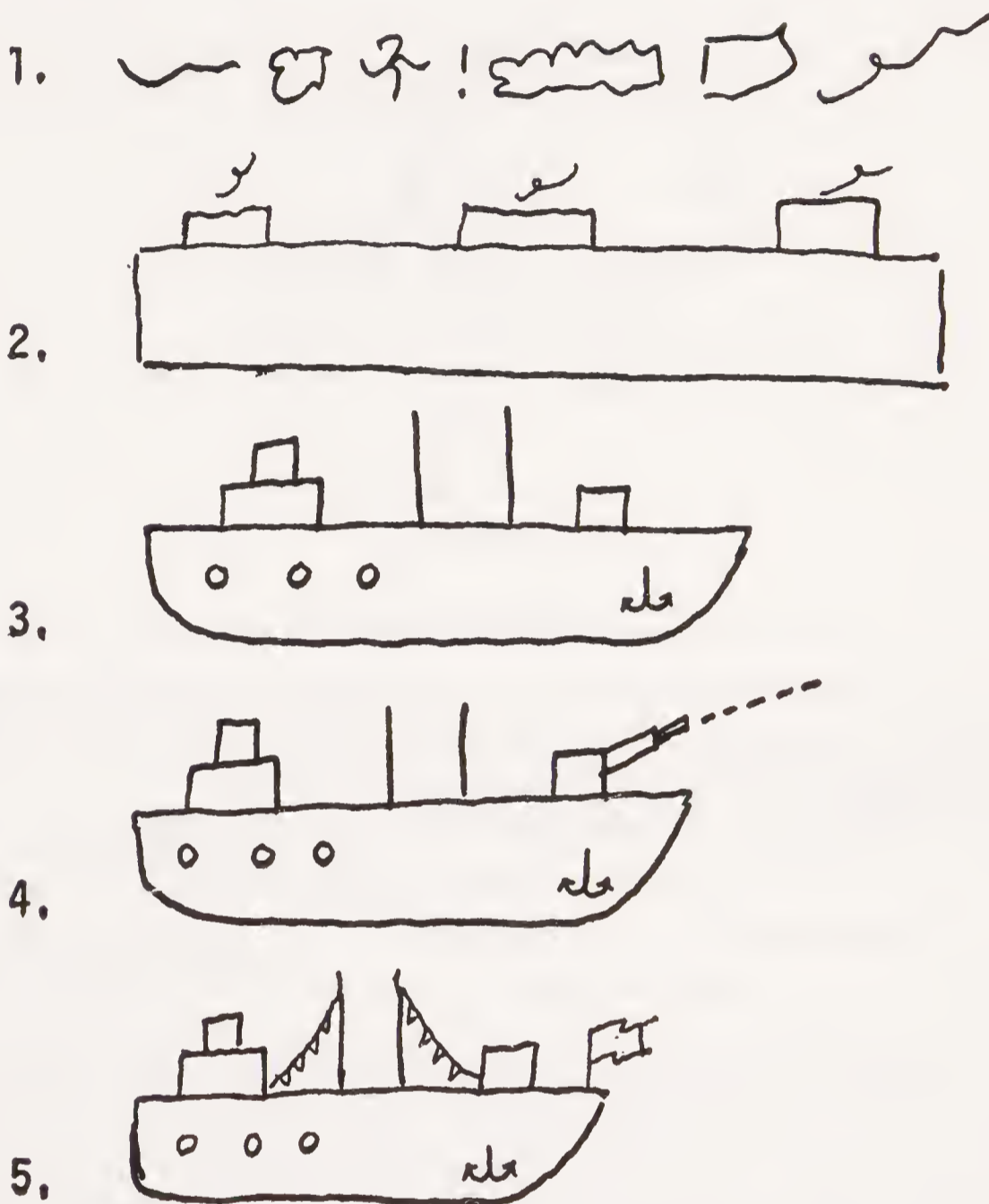
Aside from being funny, this student remembers Molly and Ned (Chapter 1) and is busy “unfixing” her mind. And she’s quite right—this is what a paragraph looks like on the page. Volunteer her to draw this picture on the board, and the discussion is ready to begin.

Most likely the class will agree with this student’s judgment—a paragraph looks like a box. But there are, of course, more abstract possibilities. Write the words “Paragraph Art” on the board and begin handing out the chalk. Ask students to go to the board and design their own interpretation of a paragraph by creating a visual picture of “what happens” in a paragraph (remember how important the visual image of typewritten paragraphs proved to be).

The models and the students’ explanations of them can precipitate a lively and fruitful discussion. Marc drew the pictures in Figure 8–1.

As Marc explains, Line 1 has a series of shapes that represent the introductory words of the paragraph. Placing himself firmly in a nautical context, he suggests that Line 2 is the factory producing the ship, or the idea. In Line 3, the ship has been completed and the major idea has been stated. Now, in Line 4, it must protect itself with ammunition, or evidence to support its claim. If this succeeds, in Line 5, the ship’s crew is rewarded, along with the writer and reader of the paragraph.

Figure 8-1 Marc's Paragraph Artwork



To extend Marc's explanation, the teacher might ask the class what type of paragraph this could be. Does a descriptive paragraph make a claim and then support it? Does a narrative paragraph? Can the lines be rearranged? These follow-up questions prepare the students for a more thorough approach to the other pictures on the board.

Betsy's paragraph art is shown in Figure 8-2.

Betsy explains that her drawing is somewhat more symbolic than Marc's. She has drawn a cloud representing a thought or idea, and she explains that all paragraphs have one controlling idea. The dots falling from the cloud represent the many small ideas that make up a paragraph. For example, in a descriptive paragraph, the dots represent the details that make up the object being described, like the parts of a face. If the descriptive paragraph is written well, Betsy says, it contains many smaller ideas that contribute to the one controlling idea.

Figure 8–2 Betsy’s Paragraph Artwork

Students offering alternative analyses of the Figure 8–2 picture suggest that the dots could also be the thoughts leading up to the main idea, or what, as writers, we have in our heads before writing the essay.

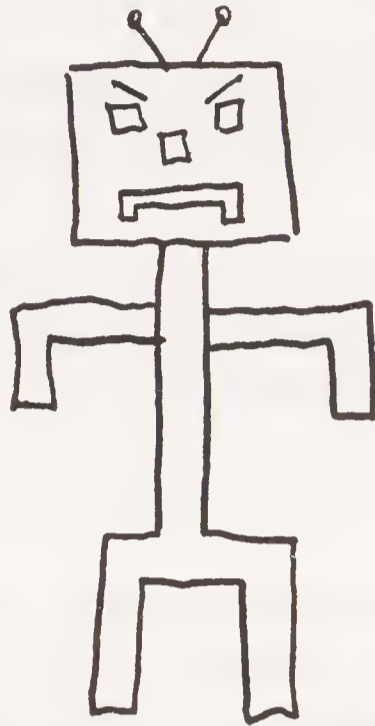
Jennifer’s contribution to paragraph art is presented in Figure 8–3.

Jennifer has been reading too much biology lately for her liking and announces that this is the way a textbook paragraph looks. It is like a robot that stares up at you. Inside the robot is the information that the reader needs to know. She believes that this type of paragraph assumes a certain degree of reader-interest before the reader opens the book. For this reason, the prose concentrates less on engaging readers and more on imparting objective, factual information. Since she is not interested in all this, she finds it boring. In contrast with Marc’s and Betsy’s paragraphs, Jennifer has stumbled upon another type of paragraph—expository.

Students will often draw pictures that reveal tone. Writers always have a particular attitude toward their subject when writing, and this attitude reveals itself in tone. Shapes and lines in pictures can convey the same moods that words and syntax convey in paragraphs. Through paragraph art, students and teacher are compelled to recognize that, in simply thinking about a paragraph, we of necessity feel a certain way about it. If we are thinking about a description of a beautiful spring in the country, our drawing will most likely be composed of gentle lines. If we are remembering a suspenseful paragraph in a murder mystery, our drawing may have sharper features.

As the discussion evolves, the students will offer their own interpretations of each drawing. They will relate what they already understand about a paragraph to the drawing under discussion. More and more ideas will emerge about paragraphs; some students will make a second drawing as a new concept arises. Comments such as “I never realized my picture had so much in it” may be heard from a

Figure 8–3 Jennifer’s Paragraph Artwork



surprised artist. Such a recognition suggests to the student that the paragraph also has “much in it,” much that is not randomly placed but deliberately crafted to communicate ideas clearly.

Paragraph Interior Design

Following the teaching of paragraph art, it is now possible to discover interior design—that is, how paragraphs work. Make a list on the board by soliciting one fact about a paragraph from each student. Specify that no fact can be repeated. Not only does this require that the students come up with their own ideas, but also that they *refine* each other’s ideas. For example: Student A suggests that “a paragraph contains a complete thought.” Student B says, “That thought is part of a larger idea contained in the essay.” Student C mentions that “a paragraph is to an essay as a word is to a sentence.”

The following paragraph analysis is the result of one such class exercise:

- It contains one main idea.
- That idea contributes to the main idea of the essay.
- The sentences are organized in logical order.
- Logical order means that, if you are describing a room, you have to point out the objects as they appear in the room, one after another; you have to take the reader by the hand.
- In a narrative paragraph, the events should occur as they happen; they should be in sequence.

- A paragraph should have no irrelevant sentences.
- A paragraph should have a definite shape (tone) to create a specific impression in the reader's mind.
- The purpose of a paragraph is to give the reader a break.
- A paragraph gives the reader's eye a rest as well as indicates that a new idea is about to begin.
- A paragraph must develop its idea fully with details.
- A paragraph must develop its idea thoroughly with details; the idea should have order and be written in an orderly way.

The Workshop

The students are now ready to look at their own paragraphs and apply the paragraph analysis already on the board. They will critique their paragraphs and then offer suggestions for revision. This is like being a mechanic; through practice, each student obtains skills that permit proper diagnosis of the problem and then repair.

Consider the following paragraph by Ricky, a student writer.

Student Example

The family saw that the line to the King Tut exhibit was just coming out of the building; they congratulated themselves on being earlybirds, but then were dismayed when they learned the line stretched all the way through the Smithsonian. It took the whole day to get through the Institute. One of the parents would keep the place in line while the other went through the parts of the Institute with the kids they were near.

What kind of paragraph is this? Descriptive or narrative? It is obviously narrative because the writer is describing an event, not an object, as it progresses through time; "then" is a clue. What is the event? Students will volunteer their interpretations of what is actually happening in the paragraph. This is important for the writer to hear in order to know what information is being understood by the reader. Ricky's paragraph has a general sequence in mind: the family arrives at the Smithsonian, but then is dismayed to find the long line they must wait in. In this case, what Ricky intended as the event and what the readers perceive is essentially the same.

But are all the sentences relevant to that event? Often, beginning writers will write down everything that comes to mind, since they are remembering the event all at once. For the first draft, this is a healthy process. Once ideas are on paper, the writer may simply check for irrelevant sentences as a first step in revision. One

way of checking is to outline paragraphs as if they were miniature essays. For more information, see “Shaping Your Subject” in Chapter 13, “Revision.”

In Ricky’s paragraph, the second sentence, “It took the whole day to get through the Institute,” advances us to the end of the event, the end of the visit, when the paragraph only intends to show them waiting in line. After we omit the second sentence, the paragraph looks like this:

The family saw that the line to the King Tut exhibit was just coming out of the building; they congratulated themselves on being earlybirds, but then were dismayed when they learned the line stretched all the way through the Smithsonian. One of the parents would keep the place in line while the other went through the parts of the Institute with the kids they were near.

Now the paragraph is focused on one event—the family arriving early only to discover the long wait in line—but there are more kinks to be worked out. Removing the second sentence creates a leap in time between seeing the line and taking the kids through the Smithsonian. Students can offer suggestions for ways to link the two sentences. For example: “In order for their long wait to pass more quickly, one of the parents. . . .”

At this point, the paragraph has a chronological sequence, and thus, a logical organization. Of course, further revision is needed to clear up vague sentences (see Chapter 7, “Sentences”), but time may not permit this. If that is the case, point out (or have students point out) where diction is troublesome. In the first sentence, “coming out” is ambiguous; similarly, in the second sentence, “kids they were near” sounds like any children that happened to be there.

CONCLUSION

In conjunction with paragraph art, students begin to see the paragraph as a complete unit with a deliberate and orderly “interior design.” A well-wrought paragraph, if excerpted from an essay, should make sense by itself. This means following a logical order that mirrors the order in which the event actually happened.

POSTASSIGNMENT

You may reinforce the skills developed in this chapter by selecting a professional sample for student analysis. Have each student present an analysis of the interior design of a paragraph by answering the following questions:

- What kind of paragraph is it? Descriptive, narrative, or both?
- What is the event?
- How is it arranged?
- Are description and narration woven together? How?

Next, have the students rewrite part or all of their narrative essays. If only one rewritten paragraph is desired, put an asterisk (*) in the margin indicating which paragraph you would like them to rewrite. Remind them that they should be able to analyze the rewritten paragraph in the same way they analyzed the professional samples.

Figures of Speech

Objectives

1. to discover the purpose of figures of speech
2. to define metaphor, simile, and analogy
3. to explore the use of metaphor and simile in analogy
4. to construct effective analogies

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FOR THE TEACHER

“It’s only a figure of speech,” someone protests, meaning the figure of speech is a mere ornament hung on a fact to make it more appealing. But if we stop to think about it, the protest means “don’t take literally what I’ve said figuratively.” More specifically, the protest means “you’ve confused one thing in my comparison with the other thing.” Such confusion results either from a poorly constructed comparison or from a reader who is too literal-minded. There is no remedy for the latter problem; but for the former, this chapter will be of some help. In this chapter we explore the purpose and construction of figures of speech: the use of words to explain what is not easily understood by comparing it to what is.

All figures of speech are metaphorical. Metaphor comes from the Greek verb *metapherein*, (*meta*) “change” + (*pherein*) “to bear,” meaning “to carry across” or “with,” and thus, in broadest terms, “a transfer of meaning.” This transfer results from a comparison of two things. The act of comparing thus accounts for the more restricted, technical definition of metaphor as an implied comparison (see the discussion below on defining metaphor and simile).

Figures of speech are essential in every kind of writing, since unknown things can be described only in terms of things known to a particular audience. Thus, the first four-wheeled vehicles propelled by internal combustion engines were called “horseless carriages.”

Figures of speech are used on both tactical and strategic levels of writing. Tactically, they appear in units as small as the word (to “blast” an opponent in a debate) and as large as several prose paragraphs or poetry stanzas (John Donne’s

poems, for instance). Strategically, they appear as allegory, fable, and parable, among other things.

At the tactical level, figures of speech can be called images. But note that images have two forms: metaphoric (as in “the ship *plows* the sea”) and descriptive (as in “a hot, black cup of coffee”). Descriptive images are made by careful diction choices (see Chapter 6, “Words”), whereas metaphoric images (the subject of this chapter) result not only from careful diction but also from careful comparisons.

As with any figure of speech, the image’s comparison must be apt in two ways. First, the things compared must be both similar and dissimilar in their properties or functions. A cafeteria cannot successfully be compared to a restaurant because the functions of both are too similar. A shoe cannot be compared to a restaurant because their properties are too disparate. Second, the emotional connotations of the two items must be similar, and the comparison must be made within a similar context. In his “I Have a Dream” speech during the August, 1963, “March on Washington,” Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of “the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” Knowing that Americans dislike limitations imposed by others, King aptly compared physical restraints with legal and attitudinal restrictions.

This chapter examines a particular figure of speech, the analogy, and, in the process of that examination, defines and demonstrates the use of metaphor and simile. By the end of the exercise, the students will be familiar with one method of structuring an analogy.

Analogies have a simple structure. Two things are said to be alike, often by use of a simile (an overt or stated comparison of two things). Each thing is defined early on; the most successful definitions of each thing usually avoid metaphors or similes common to the other thing. As the similarities of the two things are expanded, metaphors (implied or unstated comparisons) tend to appear as a sort of shorthand based on the assumption that readers have understood and accepted the initial simile.

Analogies may go on for several paragraphs. They do not, however, extend for the length of a prose piece. Such lengthy comparisons are more accurately labeled allegory, fable, or parable because, as the points of similarity multiply, they suggest a disguised representation. A large number of one-to-one similarities only points up to a paucity of dissimilarities, ultimately suggesting—as, for instance, George Orwell does—that a farm is the world, that pigs are certain kinds of people, horses another, sheep yet a third.

However, students should not conceive of analogies as discrete units that are independent of larger texts. As with words, sentences and paragraphs, analogies contribute meaning in the context of a whole piece of exposition. Practically, students will find analogies useful in one of two situations: (1) when translating

personal experiences into public ones, or (2) when explaining complicated procedures or abstract ideas.

At the end of the exercise, an in-class discussion will quickly develop around appropriate uses for images and analogies. The discussion should then move into examples of appropriate analogies.

This chapter is designed to fit into one 50-minute class period, at the end of which the students can be assigned work as reinforcement. Obviously, one treatment of a subject cannot be exhaustive, and the students should not finish the exercise mistakenly thinking that there is only one way to construct an analogy. Often, students set out to compose one figure of speech but end by composing something else (say, making a one-paragraph analogy into a three-page allegory). While it is always important to complete the assignment, it is also important to remember the Introduction's first rule: if it works, it's okay.

The structural technique analyzed and diagramed here can be incorporated immediately and successfully by young writers. Once students demonstrate a facility with this structure, they can be encouraged to experiment with others in other essays.

EXERCISES

Discovering an Analogy's Purpose

Announce to the class that analogies will be discussed today. The group will read an analogy, discuss the definitions of analogy, and look at both the purpose and the structure of an analogy. Some students—especially those with experience in forensics—may want to volunteer a definition of analogy. Restrain them for the moment, but plan to employ them later as temporary teachers.

Begin by distributing to each student copies of the following paragraph from James Thurber's (1959) *The Years with Ross*, which discusses humorously a subject familiar to all young writers. Since no analogy is isolated from a larger text, you will want to say that Harold Ross was the founding editor of the *New Yorker* magazine.

Having a manuscript under Ross's scrutiny was like putting your car in the hands of a skilled mechanic, not an automotive engineer with a bachelor of science degree, but a guy who knows what makes a motor go, and sputter, and wheeze, and sometimes come to a dead stop; a man with an ear for the faintest body squeak as well as the loudest engine rattle. When you first gazed, appalled, upon an uncorrected proof of one of your stories or articles, each margin had a thicket of queries and complaints—one writer got a hundred and forty-four on one profile. It was as though you beheld the works of your car spread all over the

garage floor, and the job of getting the thing together again and making it work seemed impossible. Then you realized that Ross was trying to make your Model T or old Stutz Bearcat into a Cadillac or Rolls-Royce. He was at work with the tools of his unflinching perfectionism, and, after an exchange of growls or snarls, you set to work to join him in his enterprise. (pp. 80–81)

Comprehension questions can be used to lead into an investigation of purpose and structure. As the comprehension questions are answered, a definition of analogy will emerge. You may want to rephrase the questions below in a way best suited for a particular class. These questions are followed by some possible answers in order to suggest the direction the discussion should take.

Begin by asking the purpose of the paragraph. Clearly, the paragraph's purpose is to explain what it was like to have Harold Ross scrutinize a piece of writing.

Why does Thurber have to explain that to us? The whole purpose of his book, as its title states, is to tell readers what the years with Ross were like. We were not there, and Thurber's experience was personal. The book is Thurber's attempt to translate a personal experience into a public one.

How does this paragraph help Thurber's purpose? It explains one personal experience. Because the personal experience is unfamiliar to others, the paragraph explains it in terms of a familiar experience.

How does Thurber explain his experience? He compares it to putting a car in "the hands of a skilled mechanic."

Is it just any skilled mechanic? No, the long series of modifying clauses that follows "skilled mechanic" defines what is usually called a "backyard mechanic," a "guy" with more experience than academic degrees.

Now, where in the first sentence is it clear that the two experiences will be compared? The words "was like" state that a comparison is being made.

This is the time to start diagramming the analogy's structure. Write the word *like* in the center of a large blank space on the blackboard. As the diagram develops, words and phrases pertaining to Ross's scrutiny will be written to the left, those pertaining to auto mechanics to the right, and those pertaining to both in the center.

Defining Metaphor and Simile

However, before developing the analogy's structure, you will need to discuss simile and metaphor. Some students may have already said that the first sentence's use of "was like" makes a simile. Ask one of them to define simile. Otherwise, ask who knows what a simile is. Then ask for an example other than Thurber's.

A simile is a stated comparison using "like" or "as." One example might be, "The room was like an oven." Explore the similarities of two things by asking what qualities they share. In the example, the two things have similar geometric shapes, and both have doors. Also, both are hot, but the room is not inherently hot.

We know that this particular room is hot because the purpose of an oven is to heat food. We know that an oven's quality of excessive heat is to be transferred to this particular room because the word *like* signals that transfer.

Now ask someone to define metaphor. A metaphor is an implied comparison. The simile in our example becomes a metaphor when "like" is removed: "The room was an oven." Compactness makes this phrasing more forceful than that of a simile. A metaphor not only retains the simile's comparison *but adds to it* with the force of grammar. In this sample, the subject-linking verb structure of "the room was" prepares readers for a complement that will literally modify "room." In any metaphor—"the manacles of segregation"—the grammatical structure appears to be literal.

Without using grammatical terms, you can demonstrate this force of grammar by writing a similarly structured sentence or phrase on the blackboard ("the room was small" or "the manacles of Simon Legree") and asking the students to compare the two. The students will see quickly that, while "small" describes a physical aspect of "room," no room is ever literally an oven. Yet, because its grammatical structure asserts identity (as opposed to simile's likeness), metaphor gives us a sense that the room is an oven in the same way that it is small. "The room was an oven" is effective because it employs both the comparison's transferred meaning and the complement's apparent literalness.

Explore the dissimilarities of "room" and "oven" by asking the students to list contrasts. An oven is much smaller than a room; and its purpose is to heat food, whereas a room's purpose is to shelter people. Also, two very different kinds of things go into rooms and ovens.

Ask the class how these dissimilarities help make the comparison effective emotionally and physically. The comparison's strength is not just in transferring the physical idea of excessive heat, but also in transferring the emotional idea that a space where food is cooked is an environment hostile to people. The comparison allows readers to picture themselves in an oven. Because an oven is not a place for people, the readers understand that the room is uncomfortable physically and emotionally.

Thus, the success of a simile or metaphor rests on two points:

1. The comparison must have both similarities and dissimilarities in property or function.
2. The comparison must have similar emotional connotations.

Defining Analogy

With a clear understanding of simile and metaphor, the class is ready to continue analyzing Thurber's analogy. This is the time to employ some students as temporary teachers. Ask for definitions of analogy, and write them to one side of

the board, adding, deleting, and conflating as necessary to get the three types of definitions below.

If no students volunteer answers, provide a minilesson yourself. Be careful to differentiate for the students the types of analogy. Clearly differentiated definitions will avoid confusing students who are familiar either with analogy questions in multiple-choice tests or the use of analogy in debate.

There are three ways to construct an analogy: in general terms, logically, and through the use of form. As each type is completed, solicit examples from the class.

General: A comparison of one or more similar particulars between two dissimilar items.

Example: A metaphor like “the ship plows the sea” is based on the analogy of a ship’s bow with the point of a plow.

Logical: Reasoning that assumes the *proven* similarities of two things—their dissimilarities being unimportant—*infer* even more similarities.

Example: The histories of Imperial Rome and contemporary America can be compared in order to argue that, like Rome, America is in its decline.

Form: As in the general type, this is a comparison that explains something unfamiliar in terms of something familiar; however, it is longer than a simile or metaphor.

Example: The Thurber paragraph used in this exercise.

Examining an Analogy’s Structure

Now, announce that you are returning to the Thurber analogy’s first sentence in order to diagram its form. Ask what two things are being compared and what figure of speech is used to make the comparison. As students volunteer answers, write the keywords on the board. For convenience of discussion, you will want labels for both left (Ross) and right (mechanic) sides and a signal to indicate comparison. These three items you can write across the diagram’s top. As in a two-dimensional graph, label the figure of speech or the purpose of the sentence to the left.

The first part of your diagram will look something like this:



Since the purpose of this exercise is to find an imitable form, the use of “that” and “this” avoids the need for “correct” labels. Memorizing labels is distracting and counterproductive. These two pronouns also provide the students with perspective; “that” is the unfamiliar, more distant thing to be explained by the more

familiar, near at hand “this.” The = symbol indicates the reader’s recognition that a comparison is being made.

After establishing the comparison in this first part, the next most obvious question (which students often ask and answer without prompting) is about the purpose of the long series of modifying clauses that follows “skilled mechanic.” Here, the earlier tasks of defining figures of speech will have suggested to the students the one necessity for any explanation—definition. If no one offers either the question (“How does this long description of the mechanic help build the analogy?”) or an answer (“It defines what kind of mechanic he means”), ask the question yourself.

Write a keyworded answer below the first part of “this.” Then draw an arrow down from “skilled mechanic” to the definition. The arrow indicates the movement of ideas through the paragraph.

	That	=	This
1. simile	R’s scrutiny of ms.	like	skilled mechanic
2. define this			↓ on car not B.S. engineer, but “backyard” mechanic

Mention also the tone of the definition. Words like “sputter,” “wheeze,” “squeak,” and “rattle”—simple, down-to-earth, mechanic’s talk—contrast with more abstract language such as “scrutiny” and “manuscript.” Thurber’s humor comes from the dissimilarities in the tone of the things compared.

Why does Thurber define “this” first? Why not define “that,” the unfamiliar thing? Readers must first be certain they know what the familiar thing is in order to compare it to the unfamiliar thing. The readers’ certainty allows the humorous transfer of “this” mechanic’s tone to “that” Ross.

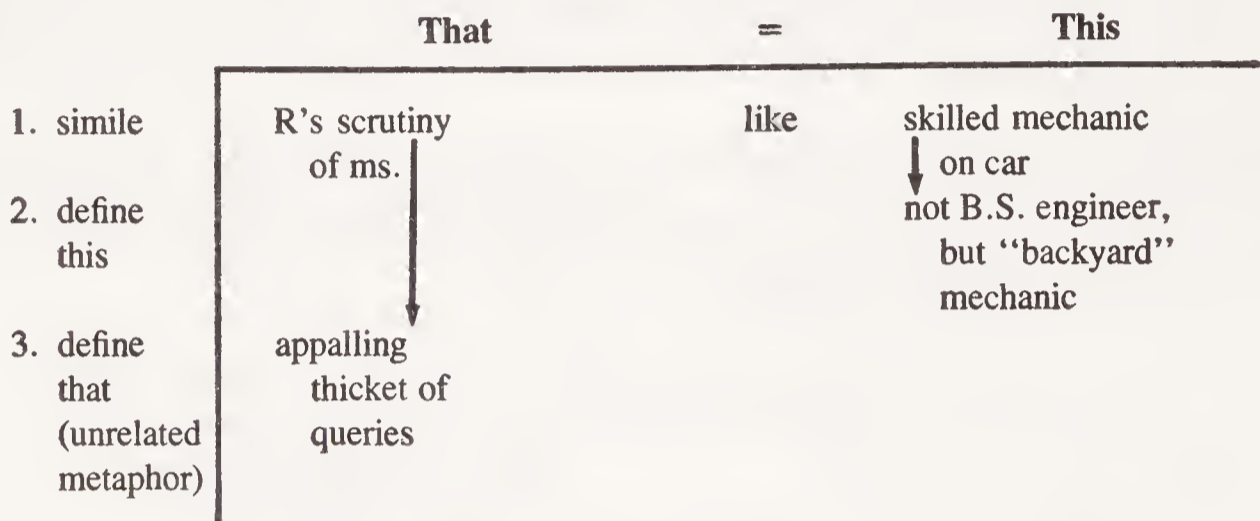
What is the second sentence’s purpose? Again, definition, but now of “that.” Note, however, the metaphor Thurber uses. Why doesn’t he use the analogy here?

If students have difficulty answering this question, you might want to demonstrate briefly how definitions are made. Solicit a word and several definitions, writing everything on the board. Usually, at least one definition will be circular (“Skiing is movement on skis”) and one will be metaphorical (“Skiing is sliding down a mountain”). Other students will easily point out the faults in such definitions. The purpose of definition is to set limits on a word’s meaning; but circular definitions set no limits, and metaphorical definitions extend limits.

Thurber’s one metaphor is unrelated to the analogy in order to avoid creating a kind of circular definition. (“That” is “this,” [which, as we will note in a moment, is “that”].) Instead of the analogy, Thurber mostly uses words and phrases that pertain to journalism: “uncorrected proof,” “stories or articles,”

“queries and complaints.” His one unrelated metaphor (“a thicket of queries and complaints”) is immediately qualified by fact—“a hundred and forty-four on one profile.”

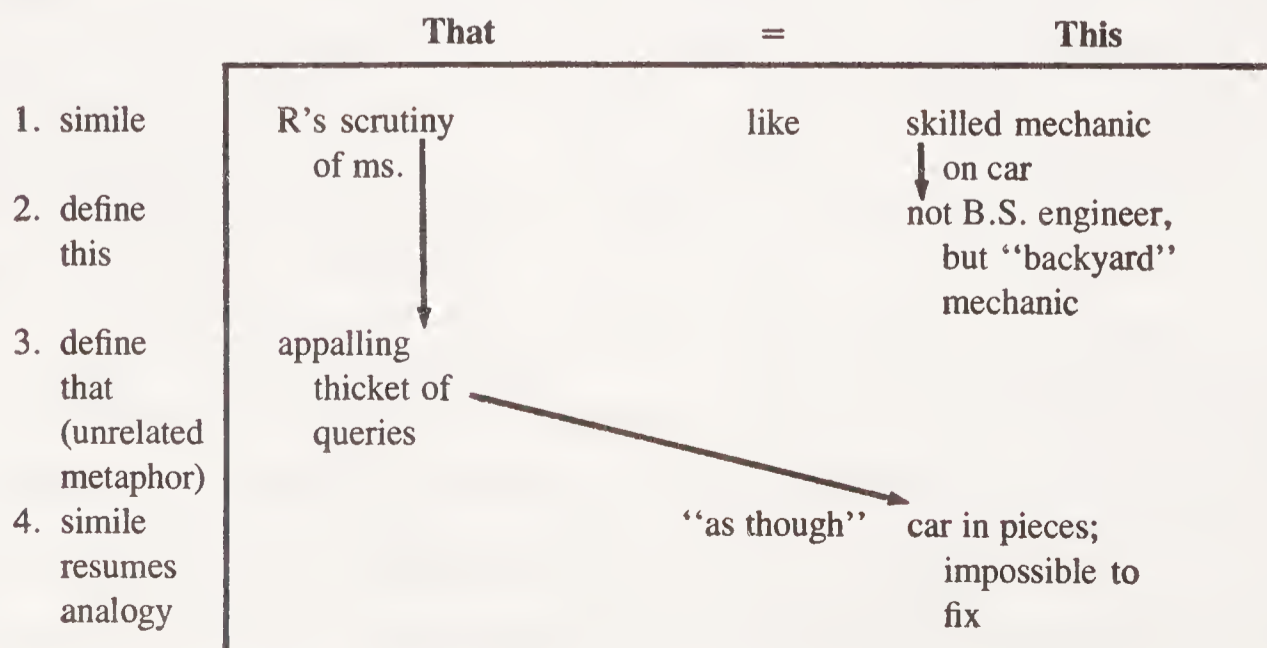
Note for the students that the sentence’s opening phrase, “When you first gazed,” indicates that Thurber is still establishing situations. The movement of the paragraph is a bit disjointed. An arrow should lead from “R’s scrutiny” to its definition, making the diagram now look something like this:



How does the third sentence resume the analogy? It resumes it with the phrase, “It was as though,” a stated comparison. In abbreviated form, this belongs in the diagram’s center.

To what does “it” refer? Obviously, we infer a reference to the whole of the second sentence. However, point out to the students that pronouns used in this way can be vague. Grammatically, the pronoun refers to “each margin,” the subject of the second sentence, not to the whole sentence.

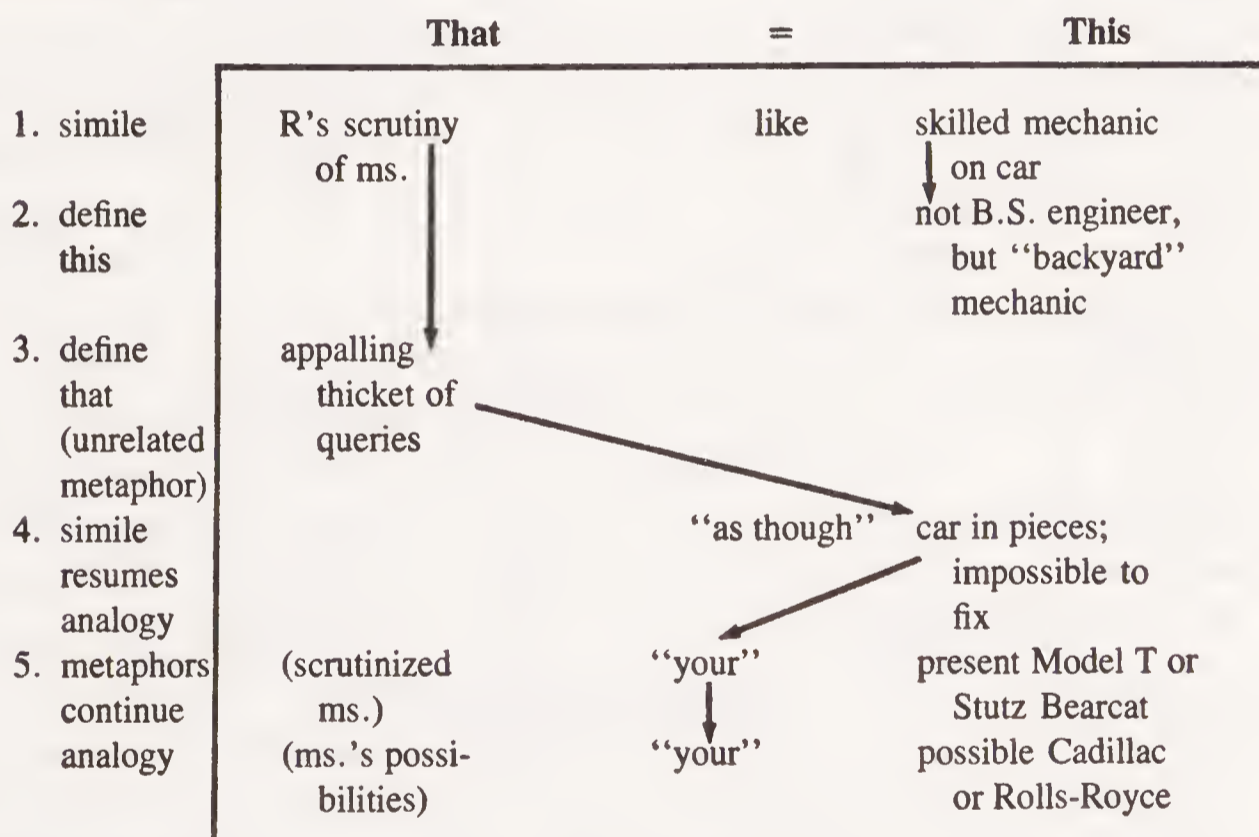
Nevertheless, from the third sentence on, the analogy is in motion. The emotional and physical result of Ross’s scrutiny—the appalling thicket of queries—is connected to that of the mechanic’s checkup—a dismayingly disassembled car. Thus, the arrow crosses diagonally down from Part 3 to Part 4.



What figure of speech does the fourth sentence use, and how is it used? Having stated the comparison in the third sentence, Thurber now moves straight into metaphor based on the analogy. The scrutinized but unrevised manuscript is compared to a Model T or Stutz Bearcat, reliable but less-than-distinguished old cars. With admirable economy, Thurber goes on to compare the manuscript's *possibilities* with the more distinguished Cadillac or Rolls-Royce.

Of course, the humor here is the impossibility of changing one car into another, but our knowledge of the difference between a manuscript and a car allows us to sense how "that" can be improved even if "this" cannot.

Precisely because metaphor asserts identity of these two incongruous things, Thurber not only makes us smile but expands our sense of Ross's scrutiny. We imagine something like a backyard mechanic in an editor's three-piece suit. The motion of the analogy toward an identity of manuscript and car adds the fifth part to the diagram.



The parentheses in the fifth part enclose implied parts of the comparison.

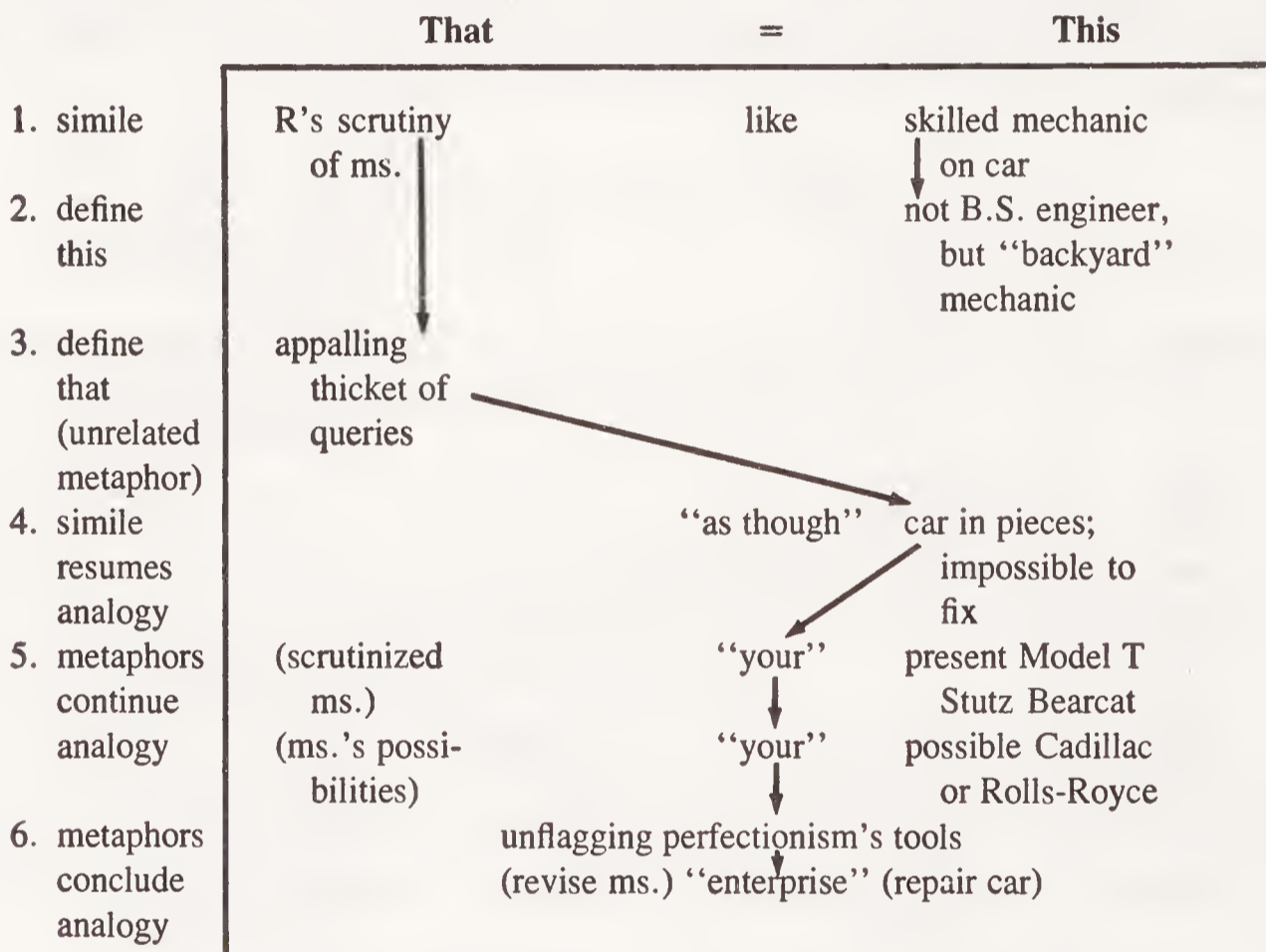
What happens to the analogy in the last sentence? Thurber uses only one metaphorical image: a comparison of "this" mechanic's "tools" with "that" Ross's "unflinching perfectionism."

Why does Thurber use only one metaphor? If his use of metaphor in the fourth sentence and early in the fifth has succeeded, readers have accepted the identity that metaphor asserts. This acceptance allows Thurber to incorporate the analogy's two tones ("this" mechanic's simple words and "that" Ross's multisyllabic words) into one sentence. We make "this's" "growl or snarl" before joining in "that's" "enterprise."

How does Thurber signal the end of the analogy? The abstract word "enterprise" (in this context, any undertaking of risk, complication, and scope) includes

actions in both parts of the analogy. Though its tone belongs to “that,” the meaning belongs to both “that” and “this;” “enterprise” has become a kind of metaphor. (See the use of content signals in the section on signaling the end in Chapter 10, “Endings.”) By recognizing that identity, we recognize the analogy’s success; we understand that having your manuscript under Ross’s scrutiny is like having your car repaired by a backyard mechanic.

Finally, why does Thurber end the analogy here? The first sentence provides the answer. The phrase “having a manuscript under Ross’s scrutiny” specifies the analogy’s limits. By the end of the fifth sentence, Ross’s scrutiny has ended and the next step—the “enterprise” of repair/revision—has begun. The diagram concludes with two metaphors, the last ending the analogy.



Conveniently, this diagram’s left margin presents a step-by-step process for imitating Thurber’s analogy form. The heart of the diagram presents a keyworded example of the analogy. And the copy of Thurber’s paragraph fleshes out that example. Armed with these, the students are ready to begin writing their own analogies.

Finding Appropriate Analogies

Before your students can write an analogy, they need a sense of when to use one. To open this discussion, you may want to announce the post assignment (see below) and then solicit examples of appropriate use. Or, you may simply ask when or where in expository prose an analogy would be necessary.

Remembering the earlier discussion (see the section on discovering an analogy's purpose), students will respond with a point that should be noted on the board:

Use an analogy when translating a personal experience into a public one.

What other situation might call for an analogy? If students have difficulty with such a general question, give them an example and ask why the analogy is necessary. For instance, why were the first cars called "horseless carriages"? Obviously, because people in that time thought in terms of horses pulling carriages. Cars were new to them. To what conclusion does that lead?

Use an analogy when explaining new, complicated, or abstract ideas.

In other words, anything unfamiliar must be explained in terms of something that is familiar *to a particular set of readers*. Now, in order to try out ideas for an analogy, solicit one part—the "that." Some possibilities: computers, open-heart surgery, my day at the King Tut exhibit, destruction of the United States in a nuclear war.

Choose one or two of these ideas and solicit comparisons. If, for example, your class were going to make an analogy for the destruction of the United States in a nuclear war, students might suggest these comparisons: Japan in World War II, the Second Coming, the effect of the Ice Age on dinosaurs.

Next, ask the students to suggest points of comparison. Note the words, phrases, and sentences they suggest on the board. As the points of comparison increase, encourage the class to evaluate the analogy's effectiveness.

To continue the example, if the destruction of the U.S. in a nuclear war is compared to Japan in World War II, the students will very quickly see one of two results. Either the parts of the analogy are too similar (nuclear bombs = fire storms and the bombing of Hiroshima), making not analogy but mere continuum, or the comparison becomes a logical analogy (because these things happened to Japan and these things are happening to the United States, we can infer. . .).

If the destruction of the United States is compared to the Second Coming, the analogy faces a different problem. The Second Coming may not be familiar enough to a sufficient number of readers to use as a comparison.

Of the three suggestions, the most promising is a comparison with the effect of the Ice Age on dinosaurs. Here, the points of similarity are balanced by points of dissimilarity. A nuclear blast is hot and quick, whereas the Ice Age was cold and slow. We can assume a nuclear war will eliminate most human life just as the Ice Age eliminated dinosaurs. Both are radical changes, though one will affect people while the other affected dinosaurs.

CONCLUSION

An analogy is a comparison of something unfamiliar with something familiar; it is usually announced by an overt statement, such as a simile, and may employ both simile and metaphor. It is important that the objects of comparison be both similar and dissimilar in properties or functions and that the emotional connotations of both be similar. The following questions will help guide students in composing their own analogies:

1. Does the subject need the help of an analogy?
 - Is it a personal experience?
 - Is it a new, complicated, or abstract idea?
2. Is the analogy appropriate?
 - Are there similarities *and* dissimilarities between the two parts?
 - Are the emotional connotations of the two parts similar?
 - Is the thing to be compared to the subject familiar to and understood by most readers?
3. How is the analogy structured?
 - Does an overt statement such as a simile announce the analogy?
 - Are both parts of the analogy clearly defined?
 - Is the familiar thing defined first?
 - Do both definitions avoid metaphors related to each other?
 - Do similes and metaphors continue the analogy?
4. Does the analogy stop once the subject is explained?

POSTASSIGNMENT

As reinforcement, have the students write one or two one-paragraph analogies. For example, ask them to write a one-paragraph analogy explaining something that they are familiar with but may be unfamiliar to other people. Since analogies are usually part of longer works, they should imagine that the paragraph is part of an essay. Suggest that they might find it helpful to jot down an idea or two to explain the rest of the essay.

As an alternative assignment, hand out copies of the following analogy by former CTY student Alyson Gabbard. Ask the students to diagram its structure and to be prepared to discuss the analogy in the next class.

Writing an essay is like making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Peanut butter and jelly are shapeless masses which hands and a knife must mold into a sandwich. In the same way, words, sentences, and

paragraphs must be written and revised to form an essay. It is as though a sticky-fingered kid has unknowingly cooked up the recipe for writing essays. Grammar often bogs down writing like peanut butter sticking to the knife instead of to the bread. But in the end, a well-written essay is eagerly consumed by the reader.

REFERENCE

Thurber, J. (1959). *The Years with Ross*. Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown.

Chapter 10

Endings

Objectives

1. to recognize when a writer has said enough
2. to signal an ending to the reader by using both content and form
3. to use a summary, a quote, or a stimulating thought as the content signals for an ending
4. to use visual layout and syntactical structure as the form signals for an ending
5. to determine which signals to employ by understanding the essay

10

FOR THE TEACHER

Aristotle stated that *an* end is the usual and necessary consequence of that which precedes it. The problem writers face is to find *the* end. This problem is two-fold: first, and most obvious, the writer must recognize when everything necessary has been said. Second, and more difficult, the writer must compose the final information so that both its content and its form signal to the reader that enough has been said. When content and form together signal organically (see the section on discovering organic form in Chapter 7, “Sentences”), the writer has found *the* ending.

Conveniently, the problem’s first part arises in the rough-draft stage, while the second part arises in revision. As a result, the sections of this chapter can be used in the classroom in different ways. The initial section on recognizing the end, rough drafts, can be used in the classroom as questions arise naturally from students about knowing *when* to end. Similarly, the second and third sections on signaling the end, revision, and determining the signals, purpose, can be used as extended digressions during a workshop as questions arise about *how* to end. Or, the whole chapter may constitute a self-contained unit.

EXERCISES

Recognizing the End: Rough Drafts

When Is Enough Enough?

There comes a time near the intended length of a final draft when the pen lifts from the paper or the typewriter turns off. The student asks, “What more did I plan

to say?" If the answer is nothing, the student rereads the last sentence or paragraph. "Does it suggest something more to say?" No. Then the student consults research notes. "Has anything important been left out?" No again. Finally, the student turns back to the opening paragraphs. "Have I left out anything I promised to mention?" No. Only then does the student suspect that the rough draft is complete.

At this stage of composition, professional writers often find themselves pacing the room and looking over their shoulders. Are more things to say chasing after the writer? Nothing more? Okay. When there is nothing more to say, professional writers stop.

Students will develop this same intuition for stopping as they gain experience in writing. But until then, asking *why* there is nothing more to say will help them recognize the best ending for a rough draft. Often, the rough draft itself contains clues that indicate when to stop. Some of these clues are discussed below.

When Is Enough Too Much?

When the writer has nothing more planned to say, it is time to reexamine the last paragraph, asking why it suggests nothing more. Often, the answer is that too much has already been said. In the concluding paragraph below, student Cybele Churches describes herself in the voice of her best male friend.

Student Sample 1

I don't have a lot of friends who are girls, but Cybele's different. She's a friend first and a girl after that. Cybele is a great friend, and I hope we are in more classes together next year.

In the workshop critique, the final sentence's redundancy was noted. Both in speech and in print, we often repeat ourselves when there is nothing more to say. Cybele's final sentence not only repeats itself but, by attesting to the friendship's duration, inadvertently generates a minor subject. The workshop suggested concluding the essay with "She's a friend first and a girl after." This revision avoids several problems that often appear throughout an essay but are particularly glaring in conclusions.

Danger.

1. *Avoid insulting the reader's intelligence.* Like explaining a joke or repeating its punchline, explicating the obvious or repeating a simple statement is condescending and insulting. To avoid this danger, writers must know and trust their readers.
2. *Avoid raising questions the writer won't and the reader can't answer.* "I hope we are in more classes together next year" does not just explicate the

obvious, it raises questions that have little to do with the essay's emphasis on nonacademic friendship. The writer does not intend to and the reader can't address questions of class scheduling.

Note that these questions are different from rhetorical questions—which are not presumed to need an answer—and from questions in persuasive writing—which assume that the reader will arrive at a desired response.

When Is Enough Not Enough?

Sometimes, the clues in the text show that everything has been said, but still the writer suspects the essay is incomplete. These moments require an outline. The section on shaping your subject in Chapter 11, “Revision,” discusses this technique in depth, but here it is important to note that such an outline reveals proportion. Clues that everything has been said can also reveal how much of everything has been said. A simple paragraph by paragraph list of topics suffices.

For example, the paragraph below, written by student Sibby Hebb, concludes an essay in which students were to describe and solve a problem.

Student Sample 2

To find a solution to this problem is difficult, but it can be done by establishing regular students-teachers conferences, in which both groups would tell their problems, give advice, etc. Hopefully more schools will begin establishing systems like this, and the problem will be solved.

Though the last sentence might have the “sense” of conclusion, a simple outline of Sibby's essay by its five paragraph topics indicates otherwise:

1. Describes the general structure of “vicious-cycle” problems.
2. Describes teachers' aims in assigning excessive homework.
3. Describes distressed students' responses (poor quality, work not done) and alarmed teachers' responses of escalating homework load.
4. Compares vicious cycle of homework load to general structure of “vicious-cycle” problems.
5. Proposes solution to homework load problem.

The disproportion between the problem's description and its solution shows that enough is not enough. Another student, assigned to revise Sibby's essay, added paragraphs detailing the solution's results and explaining the urgency of its employment. Sibby's concluding paragraph moved into the essay's middle.

Sometimes, a best ending for a rough draft is *the* best ending for a revision. Like all inspired writing, inspired conclusions are easily recognized. More often, however, an ending needs revision to become *the* ending. This is a matter of orchestrating an ending's content and form to signal a conclusion to the reader.

Signaling the End: Revision

Content Signals

The most common content signal that students learn is the summary or recapitulation. For their purposes, it is also the least useful. The average student paper is too short to benefit from repeating what brevity makes obvious. In part, the conclusion of Cybele's paragraph above suffers—even in its revised form—because it insults the reader's intelligence. After three or four pages, the reader understands the essay's subject is friendship. Repeating the obvious adds little. Summary should be saved for long pieces or very complicated arguments.

More effective content signals for student writers are quotations or stimulating thoughts. These resemble each other in that quotations are usually an attributed form of the stimulating thought. Ideally, though, a concluding quote should be in the words of someone mentioned in the essay, and this presents problems for beginning writers whose first essays may not focus on personalities. Occasionally, an effective ending can be constructed from an expert's aphorism, but more often, when the expert is not mentioned in the essay, an aphorism reads as a desperate and random selection from a book of quotations, as a tacked-on ending. Stimulating thoughts may be surprising or funny ideas; they may be metaphoric language or the last paragraph of a circular essay; they may even—and most obviously—be rhetorical or persuasive questions.

The following portion of an article by John McPhee (1982) in *The New Yorker* is an example of metaphoric language in a conclusion. Discussion of this example will help students recognize the characteristics of signaling a conclusion with a stimulating thought. In the article, "In Suspect Terrain," John McPhee concludes an extended definition of Plate Tectonics, the theory that 20-some pieces of moving crust, averaging 60 miles in depth, compose the surface of earth. In this excerpt from the definition's concluding paragraph, "Anita" is a geologist who has some disagreements with the theory's applications:

Professional Sample 1

. . .the theory took a metaphysical leap into the sancta of the gods, flaunting its bravado in the face of Yahweh. It could make a scientist uncomfortable. Instead of reaching back in time from rock to river to

mountains that must have been there—and then on to inference and cautious conjecture in the dark of imperceivable unknowns—this theory by its conception, its nature, and its definition was applying for the job of Prime Mover. The name on the door changed. There was no alternative. The theory was panterrestrial, panoceanic. It was the past and present and future of the world, sixty miles deep. It was every scene that ever was on earth. Either it worked or it didn't. Hoist it was to Heaven on its own petard. "Established" there, it looked not so much backward from the known toward the unknown as forward from the invisible to its product, the surface of earth. Anita was more worried than made hostile by all this. By no means did she reject plate theory out of hand. There were applications of it with which she could not agree. Moreover, it was too fast a vehicle for its keys to be given to children. (p. 54)¹

A series of simple questions put to the class will initiate the discussion. Again, the goal of the exchange is to recognize how content signals a conclusion. The problems of form signals and of revision can be allowed to emerge later.

What does the concluding metaphor denote? It is a comparison between plate theory as a vehicle for understanding all of geology and a swift car as a vehicle for going somewhere quickly.

What does the concluding metaphor connote? The word "children" should lead students to notice almost immediately that teenagers are usually the people asking to be given the keys. Teenagers are trained but unpracticed drivers. Children are not even trained. Thus the proponents of plate theory are compared in an exaggerated way with untrained drivers. And the phrase "too fast a vehicle" implies that plate theory can be dangerous to the untrained mind.

The denotation and connotation of the concluding metaphor provide a stimulating thought—a warning that plate theorists may have derived some rash and unscientific applications. But how does this final metaphor signal a conclusion? It sums up the implications of each of the paragraph's metaphors. For example, "to hoist with one's own petard" means to damage oneself through one's own inventiveness. And "bravado" is false courage, the swaggering of brash children. The concluding metaphor sums up each preceding metaphor's implication: plate theorists are acting like impetuous kids. Students should also note that the concluding metaphor comes from the conclusion of a familiar argument. Parents often use the authority of common sense to end arguments over the keys: "You're too young and inexperienced to drive such a dangerously fast car." That tone of finality carries over with the metaphor as a tone of finality to the paragraph.

¹From *In Suspect Terrain* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). © 1982 John McPhee. Originally in *The New Yorker*.

Form Signals

Content may clearly signal a conclusion, but content requires a form. A red light or the word *Stop* means a car must halt, and those two content signals come in the form of a three-tiered stop light or an octagonal sign. Content not only requires form, it is inextricable from form. In writing, when form replicates content, the result is called organic form. (See the section on discovering organic form in Chapter 7, “Sentences.”)

For the purposes of this discussion, form may be said to signal conclusions in these six ways:

1. by use of signal words
2. by changes of tempo
3. by use of the reprise
4. by use of metaphoric language
5. by use of circular essay structure
6. by use of the visual layout

Signal words are familiar to every writer. *All in all, overall, in conclusion, finally, thus*—each of these signals a transition into an ending. Since signal words do not contribute to a conclusion’s informational content, they constitute form.

But the other form signals are more effective, since they are more organic to a conclusion’s content. An analysis of a professional model may be the most efficient way to discover how well other form signals work. In this analysis, the instructor asks questions intended to draw from the students a list similar to that above. In the interest of saving time, the instructor may wish to augment and summarize student explanations of how form signals a conclusion. Thus, a short discussion of the signal’s effect follows some typical questions the instructor might ask about a professional conclusion.

The conclusion below is excerpted from “The American Plan,” a nonfiction section in John Dos Passos’s (1936) novel *The Big Money*. “The American Plan” describes the life and work of Frederick Winslow Taylor, the originator of the efficiency expert, the person with a stopwatch who times a factory worker’s movements with an eye to speeding up work and eliminating wasted movements in order to increase production.

Professional Sample 2

All his life he’d had the habit of winding his watch every afternoon at fourthirty;

on the afternoon of his fifyninth birthday, when the nurse went into his room to look at him at fourthirty,
he was dead with his watch in his hand. (p. 25)²

Although the nonstandard paragraphing and jammed-together words may at first disconcert students, this conclusion contains many of the form signals listed above. After a quick warning from the instructor not to paragraph in the middle of a sentence, the analysis can begin.

What is the most obvious signal that this is a conclusion? This question is a bit like asking who rode Washington's white horse, but it may lead most easily into a discussion of organic form. Obviously, we know this is a conclusion because we can see that nothing comes after it.

How does the physical end of the piece coincide with what is said at the end? Again, obviously, the writing ends when the subject, Frederick Taylor, dies. This is a simple demonstration of organic form: the physical text ends with the subject's end. Form and content die together.

Now, the instructor asks a less obvious question. How does Dos Passos use the physical text, the visual layout of print and white space, to signal a conclusion? How do the three paragraphs create a sense of conclusion? The effect of Dos Passos's peculiar paragraphing is to provide a longer pause than that provided by a comma, semicolon, or period. The white space around the paragraphs slows the tempo of the prose, and, since we associate slowing down with coming to an end, we sense that we are reading a conclusion. Note that this is a case where two form signals—slowing tempo and physical layout—work simultaneously and organically with content.

Tempo is also a matter of rhythm. Some students may note that each paragraph contains shorter syllabic groups than the paragraph before it. Such successive shortening contributes to the slowing tempo. Similarly, the last paragraph uses three anapestic feet (two short and one long syllable) to emphasize three words—"dead," "watch," and "hand"—and that emphasis allows the instructor to ask the next question.

Is there a connection between the emphases in the last paragraph and the slowing tempo? Dos Passos explicitly connects the winding of the watch to a life-long habit. We wind watches because they run down, and the slowing tempo of the prose reinforces the sense in this conclusion that Taylor's watch has wound down.

Why did the author mention the watch in the conclusion? Obviously, the watch is a fact in Taylor's death scene, but it serves more purposes. The instructor can stimulate a discussion of those purposes by reminding the students that Taylor invented the efficiency expert. Since efficiency experts time the movements of

²Copyright by Elizabeth H. Dos Passos.

workers, the watch reminds us of Taylor's major achievement. In this light, the watch can be called a "reprise," a musical term meaning a return to an original theme. *Without explicitly stating his point*, Dos Passos harks back to Taylor's invention.

Some students may observe that the techniques of reprise and concluding metaphor resemble each other. For instance, McPhee's concluding metaphor summarizes the implications of its preceding metaphors (see the section on content signals above), and Dos Passos's reprise recalls the short biography's major emphasis. The observation is accurate, but it is important to differentiate between flat statements of summary or recapitulation and the use of reprise, metaphoric language, and even of circular essay structure.

McPhee, the instructor can point out, could have summarized his concluding paragraph by writing, "Anita felt that plate theory allowed inexperienced geologists to make rash claims." As admirable as the clarity of flat, abstract statement is, students will see immediately that it does not present readers with an image and attitude that are tangible and familiar, that make readers *feel* as well as understand.

Feeling is also at work in circular essay structure, which is a return in the last paragraph to a vividly presented problem or idea in the first. The opening and concluding paragraphs by A.M. Rosenthal (1958) below provide such a return. Instructors can present students with these paragraphs and the article's title, "No News from Auschwitz," then request guesses as to what comes between them.

Professional Sample 3

The most terrible thing of all, somehow, was that at Brzezinka the sun was bright and warm, the rows of graceful poplars were lovely to look upon and on the grass near the gates children played.

. . . .

There is nothing new to report about Auschwitz. It was a sunny day and the trees were green and at the gates the children played. (section VI, p. 5)³

As the title makes obvious, what comes between the paragraphs is a description of the Auschwitz concentration camp, specifically of the camp's Brzezinka portion. Rosenthal toured the camp in 1958, and as both his title and his article point out, there is nothing new about the horror that happened there during the Second World War.

The instructors should next ask what problem the opening paragraph presents. By contrasting the idyllic scene with the anticipated description of the concentra-

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tion camp, Rosenthal presents readers with “the most terrible thing of all”—life surrounding a memorial to so much death. Once the class has a sense of the article’s content, it can go on to the conclusion.

How does the final paragraph signal an ending? It returns to the problem described in the opening paragraph. Such a return indicates that Rosenthal has no solution to the problem.

And how, the instructor may ask, does the final paragraph return to the opening problem? The author repeats key words and phrases from the opening paragraph: “the gates,” “children played.” Also, rather than simply recopying the first paragraph, Rosenthal condenses phrases. “The sun was bright and warm” becomes “it was a sunny day.” “Rows of graceful poplars lovely to look upon” becomes “the trees were green.” Note that Rosenthal’s condensations do not reduce to flat, abstract statements. Like a reprise, condensations hark back to the fuller phrases. Additionally, the last paragraph’s first sentence harks back to the title and to a sentence that occurs in the article as a refrain.

This deft brevity is a technique students can easily employ in their own writing. Brevity is integral to circular structure since an essay’s conclusion does not require a full restatement of the problem. Circular structure signals a conclusion simply by its return to the beginning. In the case of Rosenthal’s article, a literal circuit of the concentration camp is over when the author exits through the same gates he entered. Circular structure, then, is organic not just to conclusions but to the whole composition.

The final and perhaps most important question about circular structure is when and why to use it. By asking why Rosenthal chose this particular form to signal his conclusions, the instructor can lead the discussion into the more general question of deciding which conclusion signals to use and when.

Determining the Signals: Purpose

The quickest way to decide why Rosenthal chose circular structure for his article may be to ask again what the return to the opening problem indicates. And, given that Rosenthal has no solution to that problem of life continuing around a memorial of death, the follow-up question is, What effect does the failure to solve the problem have on the reader? The reader is left to ponder an apparently insoluble problem, a problem that—like a circle—seems to have no beginning and no end, a problem that won’t go away.

After soliciting a list of possible uses for circular structure and writing them on the blackboard, the instructors should note that the uses and their subjects fall into two categories: major problems and trivial concerns. Ending the nuclear arms race is a major problem; dealing with an increasing load of homework is a comparatively trivial concern.

Both these subjects, when put in circular structure, intend to have a certain effect on readers. The instructor may ask how that effect differs from the intentions of the Dos Passos piece.

The difference is between an intent to persuade and an intent to inform. Brooks and Warren (1979, p. 40) divide rhetoric into five modes: exposition, argument, description, narration, and persuasion. For the purposes of this chapter, it is easy to see that the five modes divide into two categories. Argument and persuasion are intended to motivate readers to action. Exposition, narration, and description are intended to inform readers. The intentions of these two categories broadly decide which ending signals a writer will employ.

Persuasive Signals Point Outside

The instructor should ask the class to look once again at all the conclusions in this chapter and to categorize them as either motivational or informative. The motivational conclusions in this chapter are Student Sample 2 (Sibby's paragraph), Professional Sample 1 (McPhee's paragraph), and Professional Sample 3 (Rosenthal's paragraph). The informative conclusions are Student Sample 1 (Cybele's paragraph) and Professional Sample 2 (Dos Passos's paragraph).

What makes the motivational conclusions motivational? A quick analysis by the class will show that these conclusions are intended to motivate readers to action. In Student Sample 2, Sibby connects the word "hopefully" with her proposal for student-teacher conferences, indicating her wish that more school systems establish systems like this. In Professional Sample 1, MCPhee's concluding metaphor warns that plate theorists may be rash, and readers—like all listeners—are expected to heed warnings. In Professional Sample 3, Rosenthal tosses the problem to the reader by not providing a solution to the problem he sets in his first paragraph.

But the students should note that, as strongly as the motivational conclusions point outside the text, they also provide a sense of finality. In practical terms, certain form signals may have neutral intentions. These include signal words, tempo, and the visual layout. However, when coupled with the other form signals, conclusions can be motivational.

Informative Signals Point Inside

What makes the informative signals informative? Some students may define them negatively: informative signals do not point outside the text, do not intend to incite the reader to action. Other students may define them as conclusions that stop when the text stops. In Student Sample 1, Cybele intends to describe to readers, through the voice of her best male friend, what she is like. This description will not require any action on the reader's part. In Professional Sample 2, Dos Passos narrates a man's life, and, while the effects of the Taylor System of Scientific Management continue to this day, Frederick Taylor's life is over.

CONCLUSION

Endings use organic form—the harmony of content and form—to signal a conclusion. But before students can focus on their best ending, they must recognize the point where they have said all there is to say. Once a composition is at *an* end, the students can bring to bear content and form techniques that create *the* best ending. In order to create the best ending, students must know the purpose of their composition.

The following questions will help students recognize and revise their conclusions:

1. Is the composition at an end?
 - Is all the pertinent information included?
 - Is all the pertinent information included in proportion to its importance?
 - Does the final paragraph raise *only* rhetorical or persuasive questions?
2. Does the content signal an ending?
3. Is the ending written in organic form?
 - Are signal words necessary?
 - Does the tempo of the prose slow?
 - Should major points in the composition be reprised?
 - Would metaphoric language make the content more interesting?
 - Has the visual layout (white space around paragraphs and at the bottom of the page) been used?

POSTASSIGNMENT

Several assignments may grow out of these exercises as reinforcement. Instructors wishing to work with smaller units of prose may have their students revise (1) one or more of the endings to their own compositions or (2) one or more of their classmates' compositions. Optionally, instructors may require in addition written analyses of the intention of the compositions and the intended effect of the revised conclusions.

Instructors who prefer to work with the whole essay may assign students a circular structure. This is best accomplished after a discussion of the feasibility of the topics listed above in the section on determining the signals: purpose. Additionally, taking students through a paragraph-by-paragraph structuring of a sample topic will improve their chances of success.

Finally, students may be assigned an analysis of a professionally written conclusion. The analysis should include a discussion of the essay's purpose and the techniques employed in its ending.

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Part III

Rewriting

How a Workshop Works

Objectives

1. to develop a group skilled in the investigation and evaluation of writing techniques
2. to demonstrate that evaluation is the first step in revision
3. to provide student authors with candid, specific, and helpful evaluation of their prose
4. to teach students how to teach each other

FOR THE TEACHER

In a workshop, students become critics and editors, actively discussing each other's work. The goal is to reveal strengths and weaknesses of the writing so that the author may improve it. As fellow writers, students are expected to critique an essay with the same care they would want for their own writing.

For beginning writers, this experience may seem threatening. Their essays are placed on the table, right before the watchful eyes of colleagues, each of whom will eventually undergo the same experience. Just as it may be the first time an author's work has been carefully scrutinized, so it may be the first time a student critic has been responsible for discussing *how* language works on the page. If this activity is to be a positive and growing experience for every student in a workshop, new skills must be learned.

These new skills, once learned, ensure a sophisticated critique of each student's essay. As teacher, you must first demonstrate this sophisticated critique both in your written comments on essays and in the conduct of the initial workshop. The students must have already seen your written critique of at least one essay before the initial workshop. During the initial workshop, you will do most of the talking, demonstrating the approach successive workshops will take. In the second workshop, you should ask questions that help the students clarify their ideas. Gradually, they will "get it straight," taking over the actual workshop process with less teacher intervention.

You should steer students away from comments like, "I don't like the story." This response, typical of the inexperienced writer, offers nothing constructive for

the author; to vote one's likes and dislikes is simply a matter of personal taste. In workshops, taste must be supported by an appropriate justification. You must carefully guide the students through an analysis of an essay until they understand why they like or dislike some aspect of it. For example, the student who does not like an essay might be asked what the storyline is in order to begin a discussion of interpretation—perhaps there are several interpretations. Students are continually surprised to hear the many ways language can be interpreted. This variety of interpretation raises their curiosity about which interpretation the author intended. This curiosity causes the students to take a second and third look at the essay, making sure they have not overlooked anything. Before you know it, the original comment, "I don't like the story," has been rechanneled and refocused on aspects of the essay that may not be clear.

Most importantly, the essay must be praised. In a workshop, where the student author remains in the spotlight for an extended period, absence of praise can be devastating. For this reason, you must select for the workshop only those student essays that achieve a qualified success—that is, essays with strengths and weaknesses, both of which deserve analysis.

You must guide the students in constructive praise and constructive inquiries about content and form. You must insist that students articulate their points precisely. When you ask the difficult question, "Why do you like it?" and the student shrugs, you should then ask if there is a word or phrase that stands out as particularly effective. Ask anything that will make the students think about how language is working, that will guide them to a discussion of specific passages in the student author's text.

More precisely, workshops talk about strategies and techniques that appear in professional essays, in classroom exercises, and ultimately in students' essays. Strategies used in professional essays are, for example, the circular structure of A.M. Rosenthal's "No News from Auschwitz," described in Chapter 10, "Endings." Some classroom exercises in the use of techniques are also found in other chapters. For example, the class may study selection and presentation of detail as discussed in Chapter 4, "Group Story."

But the heart of a workshop, the meaning of the word as most writers use it, and the subject of this chapter is evaluation of an author's text by a group of peers. In this case, we mean evaluation of a student essay by a class of fellow students. The talk in your student workshops should, in part, focus on the student author's application of the strategies and techniques that have already been analyzed in class. A workshop member might ask, for example, where in the essay text a writer succeeds in transmitting an experience through choice of detail.

In addition to evaluating writing techniques, students evaluate the content of essays. The students may complain that they find a particular essay "boring" because they do not like the subject. In this situation, it is likely that an undeveloped idea is the cause. Have the students "think out loud" about the topic,

perhaps considering aspects merely touched upon in the essay. In this manner, the writer can go back and find the true subject. (See the section on “Finding Your Subject” in Chapter 13, “Revision.”)

What works and what doesn't? These are the primary questions that the whole workshop (students and teacher) asks continually. Sometimes, students agree vigorously with each other; at other times, they disagree just as vigorously. Writers learn to reflect on aspects of writing that previously they had only vaguely perceived. With the teacher acting as moderator for an audience of peers, both writers and students profit from the critical but supportive activity. Students leave the workshop with constructive feedback about the prose discussed and with the skills necessary to critique and revise their own essays. Having been exposed to a variety of successful techniques, they are eager to try them out in their own writing.

At the end of each workshop, the students should add to their list of rules for writing—a list that grows throughout the course. (See Introduction for some of our rules.) They should realize, of course, that rules are only general guidelines and strategies. There may be times when breaking a rule supplies the perfect touch. For example, to describe monotony, vague verbs might achieve a monotonous tone, thus breaking the “no boring verbs” rule. Since no rule is absolute, students are forced to exercise judgment rather than good memory. Over time, this judgment will be challenged and refined as their own writing and reading skills develop.

EXERCISES

Preparing for the Workshop

Each time an assignment is handed in, select two essays for each hour of workshop. The selection can be made on the basis of what techniques were to be tried and which attempts deserve a closer look. These attempts should show some degree of success. In this manner, the selection is never random, and the workshop never becomes a roasting session with the author on the skewer. Once the essays have been selected, they are typed and reproduced for each student. (We have found that, if we expect students to type their essays without making it an absolute requirement, they are willing and even enthusiastic about learning to type. By the end of the course, many essays will be submitted typed, ready to be reproduced.) The essays should be free of your corrective marks.

After each student has received a copy, it is helpful to set up the following guidelines until the class understands how to critique the essay:

1. Read the essay just as you would a story in a book. Enjoy it.
2. Read the essay out loud and listen to how it sounds. Consider the following questions:

- Do the title and opening sentence make you want to continue reading? Is the title effective?
- Is the language specific and concrete? Are there any “wonderful words?”
- Are there any specific details that make the event come alive? Which details are most powerful? Least powerful?
- Are the paragraphs developed and cohesive? Be specific. Do they follow a logical order?
- What kind of ending is there? Is the ending effective? Why or why not?

In the following sections, two types of workshop structures are presented, each with its particular merits.

Workshop Structure I

The first structure has seven basic steps, each of which is discussed in detail:

1. The class reiterates the objectives for a particular assignment.
2. Each student receives a copy of the essay and signs up to discuss a particular objective during the workshop.
3. The author reads the essay to the class and then remains silent until the end of the workshop.
4. Each student praises one aspect of the essay.
5. Each group discusses its designated objective.
6. The author is given the opportunity to speak a one-sentence defense.
7. The class summarizes the techniques that appear to have worked.

Step 1—Reiteration of Objectives

The objective should be to apply in the workshop whatever new techniques you have asked the students to develop. In the sample essay following this section, the students were asked to use concrete language, detail, and a logical sequence of events in a personal experience narrative.

Step 2—Sign-up

Sign-up involves the students choosing a particular area to discuss in the essay. There are three general area categories, but each includes subheadings that may change from assignment to assignment:

1. *Mechanical engineers.* These students are responsible for discussing grammar and punctuation. If the essay is error free, they can focus on sentence structure or paragraph organization.

2. *Narrative technicians.* These students are responsible for discussing particular narrative objectives. They divide themselves according to three techniques:

Concrete Language	Detail	Sequence
Is the language specific and concrete?	Does the author use appropriate details to engage the reader?	Are the events presented in a logical order?

3. *Transitional traffic cops.* As the name suggests, these students examine the effectiveness of the various transitions incorporated in the essay. They initially identify both implicit and explicit transitions and then suggest ways to improve the connections between sentences and between paragraphs.

Step 3—The Author

Once all students have signed up for a particular area of expertise, an author reads an essay. These are the author's last words until the end of the workshop. After reading, the author is put under "the cone of silence" and remains silent, listening to what peers have to say. Naturally, this action encourages frustration when the peers discuss an aspect of the essay that the author never intended. The author may resort to making signs, shaking the head, or grunting with sealed lips, but again, no speech is permitted. The author's challenge is to assume a calm demeanor and listen to what is being said. During the first few workshops, you can expect some wild antics, but with time and your discouragement they will disappear.

Insisting that the writer be silent reproduces how most writing is experienced. We never have the writer peering over our shoulder, explaining what is not already clear. It is the author's responsibility to make what is intended perfectly clear on paper or else risk misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Step 4—Opening Celebration

Each student chooses a favorite part of the essay—a word, a phrase, an idea—and praises it. The students begin to see "what works." This is a very reinforcing time; if five students talk about a favorite simile, you have a good chance of seeing a simile from each student in the next essay.

Step 5—Mechanical Engineers/Narrative Technicians/Transitional Traffic Cops

Each of the three groups has a chance to discuss its particular area. For example, the mechanical engineers would simply focus on the mechanics of the essay. When they were finished, the workshop would then turn its attention to the narrative technicians, and from there to the transitional traffic cops. Eventually,

after each objective has been discussed, this can become a large group discussion about the whole essay.

Step 6—A Single-Sentence Defense

At last the cone of silence is lifted, and the author has a say. Only one sentence, though (watch out for the run-ons), and only one issue. This forces the author to discriminate, to choose the most important issue. Sometimes it might simply be a phrase that some students misinterpreted.

Step 7—Summary

Finally, the class, author included, recalls what worked in the essay (and what didn't) in an effort to derive techniques the students could apply to their own writing. For example, the class may have loved the sentence "She has a face as vacant as a postage stamp." The technique at work is a simile. But why so effective? It is fresh; we instantly get a picture and thus become more involved. Conclusion? A new simile can be a powerful source of description.

To conclude this section, we present in Figure 11-1 a student essay that is ready for the workshop and that has also been critiqued by the instructor. In our own workshop, the witch imagery of Mrs. Weiss and the werewolf imagery of Rex, the collie, sparked an interesting discussion. Some students believed the dog, with his "conical teeth and evil dark eyes," to be as bad if not worse than Mrs. Weiss and were relieved when he was put to sleep. The discussion caused the author to reflect on the early childhood experience that motivated the writing and to reconsider what led to Rex's demise.

Workshop Structure II

An alternative workshop structure resembles that which James Moffett (1968) describes in his *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. Moffett describes a feedback situation in which writing is read and discussed by an audience of "coaches" who respond candidly and specifically. "Adjustments in language, form, and content would come as the writer's response to his audience's response" (p. 193). However, Moffett advocates breaking a class of 30 or so into small groups, with occasional whole-class sessions in which the instructor discusses problems relevant to everyone. Since we advocate classes of no more than 15, we have found a whole-group workshop with the instructor as fellow-investigator more effective. (See Introduction.)

Workshop Structure II has the merits of providing more discussion time and of allowing more quality feedback to the author. Its chief disadvantage is lack of immediacy; there is a lag between handing in the assignment and workshopping it.

Figure 11-1 A Critiqued Student Essay

Life

as if they stopped before car came

Bob, Steve, and Ken were walking down the street with staccato steps. ^{Why?} ^{When} Then a blue car with a black top pulled next to them. A smudgy, finger-printed window was rolled down, and a sixty year old woman with bright blond hair stuck her semi-triangular head through the opening of the window.

plot hook?
vivid image

terrific (witch-like)

"You better hush up your mean dog or I'll complain to a higher authority," said the woman. It was Mrs. Weiss. She was a neighbor who lived in a beautiful radiant house down the road. Mrs. Weiss had begun to complain ^{again} _{mm} about Bob's collie Rex. Everyday she jogged 2 miles and whenever she passed Bob's house, Rex would bark at her and then follow her.

could you be more specific?

writing could be more immediate, vivid

"I'm sorry about Rex, but he's just a small puppy," replied Bob.

terrific verbs

"That's what you think" sneered Mrs. Weiss as she gunned her engine and whizzed away. Bob was my bother Steve's best friend. We lived in

witch-like

Figure 11-1 continued

what is purpose here?

shift in person → Ken → I;

a small development near the city Havre de Grace. 3rd to 1st

Havre de Grace was a small town but it had

everything a person needed: a bank, a library, a

grocery store, and a wharf. I told Bob to

forget about it and we both walked home. 3 boys

as opposed to a winter day? include summer earlier in essay

the next summer day, Steve and I decided to

go to Bob's house and play some Star Trek on his

computer. When we reached Bob's driveway we saw

Mrs. Weiss jogging in the road in front of the

house. (She was) dressed in a green and yellow

striped shirt and white shorts. ^{she} She jogged

clunky rhythm

as if each step was the most important thing in

her life. Each foot was placed in front of the

other in perfect unison.

good simile but backwards dog to Mrs. Weiss torpedos from sub

Suddenly we heard a bark and saw Rex jump

out of his house and began to home in to Mrs.

Weiss like a torpedo from a sub. When Mrs. Weiss

saw Rex, she began to quicken her steps and take

quick glances behind. In five seconds Rex

reached the curb (of the street) and began to bark

angrily at her. His white conical teeth were

Figure 11-1 continued

bared and he had an evil look in his dark black eyes. Then Mrs. Weiss began to scream and exclaimed "Mad Dog!"

he sounds like vicious-I'm scared too

We ran to Mrs. Weiss and held Rex back.

"Get that dog away," screamed Mrs. Weiss.

"But he didn't touch you," replied Steven.

Combine ideas or get everyone back in house

By this time Bob and his mother had heard what had happened and ^{were} (ran) outside. After Bob's mother apologized for what had happened, Mrs. Weiss (had) finally left. We believed that Mrs. Weiss would let us alone but it turned out the opposite. *too much telling*

Three ~~About~~ 3 hours later, a police car pulled up

in the driveway and a gray uniformed man stepped out. We didn't hear what the man (and Bob's mother) said but we guessed what was going to happen.

The next day Bob's dog Rex was put to sleep, permanently. Why? Because a lady was frightened of him. Bob had lost his dog while Mrs. Weiss gained the peace she so unnecessarily needed.

However, this lag also allows students time to read, reread, and digest the essay, with the result that comments are more considered. This structure may be particularly useful where class time is less than one hour and there are more tasks than those of the workshop to complete.

The six steps in this structure are simple:

1. The instructor selects an essay, duplicates it, and distributes it at least one day in advance.
2. Students read and write comments on the essay at least the night before the workshop; they must then compose a summary sentence.
3. At the workshop's beginning, the author may make a brief statement about the essay.
4. Students read their summary sentences, and any complications are resolved.
5. During the workshop, students comment "as the spirit moves them," the author contributing as necessary.
6. At the end of workshop, copies of the essay with each student's comments are returned to the author.

Step 1—Selecting an Essay

The instructor selects an essay, to quote Moffett (1968), without presenting it "as good or bad . . . without trying to grind some academic ax. . . . He picks papers embodying issues he thinks concern students and need clarifying" (pp. 196–197).

This is nonjudgmental selection, not necessarily based on success with the assignment. By selecting an essay because it is "good," the instructor, by implication, would punish the unselected authors for being "bad." The students so punished may find it more and more difficult to compose as their essays go unselected. As Moffett writes, "Inevitably, the child who is afraid to make mistakes is a retarded learner" (p. 199).

Practically, however, classroom teachers must have an answer for students who ask about selection criteria. We have found it sufficient to answer simply that an essay is "instructive, as you'll see in the workshop." This claim is supported by the extra discussion time this workshop structure provides. Because the instructor distributes the essay in advance of the workshop, the author need not use class time to read. Thus, more aspects of the essay than merely the assignment can be discussed.

For example, an essay assigned to imitate George Orwell's use of a concrete incident to illustrate an abstract idea (as in "Shooting an Elephant") may have faulty structure. Perhaps the abstract idea is missing. But with extra time, the workshop can also examine the details that make the concrete incident come alive.

Step 2—Commenting on the Essay

Here again, early distribution of the essay ensures quality feedback in the workshop. The students will not use time in the class figuring out what they have heard. Their comments will have been prepared with consideration. Composing a summary sentence in advance allows each student to have a condensed and abstracted idea of the essay's meaning. Chapter 12, "Summarizing the Essay," details the process of composing a summary sentence. The act of composing a summary requires that each student consider the salient aspects of an essay, as listed in the questions at the end of Chapter 12.

As noted earlier, it is essential that students have in hand the instructor's written critiques of their own essays before they write comments on the essays to be workshopped. Their work will then be modeled on the instructor's.

Step 3—Letting the Author Speak

This is the beginning of the actual workshop, and the speech, which is at the author's option, should be perfunctory. Technical corrections may be announced, and intended goals may be described. Neither elaborate defenses nor disavowals should be allowed.

Step 4—Reading Summary Sentences

Summary sentences let the author know whether the essay says what it was intended to say, and they let the class know whether it agrees on what the essay says. This saves time.

A consensus of summaries may cut off a monologue by the one student who completely misread the essay, though any misreading is worth the author's notice. Conversely, an absence of consensus may initiate the workshop discussion. In fact, an absence of consensus may save time by indicating immediately the major difficulties with an essay, thus focusing workshop discussion.

Any complications and disagreements in summaries must be resolved immediately. Before you can talk about how an essay has been written, everyone needs to agree on what it means.

Early in the year, the teacher may want to require that every student read a summary. Later, only a few such readings may suffice. The teacher, of course, always reads a summary sentence; this reading acts either as a model for accurate composition or as a demonstration that adults, too, make mistakes. (For the applications of summary sentences in revision, see Chapter 13.)

Step 5—Workshopping

Having agreed on what the essay means, the group turns to the heart of the workshopping process. It is important that the group understand the difference

between workshopping, the investigation of technique (how), and interpreting, the investigation of meaning (what). John Ciardi's "Robert Frost: The Way to the Poem" (1958) demonstrates masterfully the method of asking "how" professional writing means. Every workshop structure, however, demonstrates a slightly different approach to student writing. Workshop Structure II asks, "How *should* this essay mean?"

Such a question involves workshop members in the creative process. Everyone is, for a while, a cocreator of the essay, weighing the effect of this verb choice, of that rhetorical structure. If the essay were a professional model, the group would be analyzing it for useful techniques. But student essays are evaluated for the use of technique to achieve a meaning. And the only way the workshop can evaluate such use is by comparing the intentions with the realization. This requires author participation. Only when intentions are voiced can the workshop suggest remedies, if necessary. This comparison provides quality feedback that the author can carry into revision.

Thus, the actual workshopping can proceed from the resolution of summary sentence conflicts, through reiteration of the assignment and assessment of the essay in those terms, to examination of other aspects of the writing. Students may be allowed to comment as questions come and go, with the understanding that everything from mechanics to essay structure is open to discussion. The instructor requires the students to cite the text with each comment, which precludes unsubstantiated generalizations. Finally, in the unlikely event that students do not volunteer the necessary praise mentioned earlier, the instructor may request it.

Step 6—Returning the Essay

The sophisticated interaction of workshopping happens too quickly for authors to take notes. Therefore, when the workshop is over, the students return their copies to the author. Though the workshop will have generated a number of new and unrecorded ideas, suggestions, and insights about the essay, the returned copies provide a record of readers' initial responses to the writing. This collective record will prove useful for revision.

It is not necessary, but we find it useful, to require names on the returned copies. Names help jog the reviser's memory of the workshop. Needless to say, it is also good pedagogical practice to summarize orally the major conclusions of the workshop, as in Workshop Structure I.

CONCLUSION

Whichever structure you choose, it is important to remember that the workshop is a student-oriented, student-run process. Initially, the teacher demonstrates the appropriate technique and the level of sophisticated critique; but, the sooner the

teacher becomes a simple colleague at the workshop table, the sooner the workshop begins to resemble the kind of quality feedback situation James Moffett describes: an author writing for a wider audience than one, with the luxury of hearing that audience's responses.

Needless to say, this kind of student-oriented environment requires an instructor who understands, as Moffett (1968) says, that the role of the teacher "is to teach the students to teach each other" (p. 196). Such an instructor must have a strong enough sense of self to participate as a fellow investigator, not to operate as an overbearing overseer, dictating taste from above.

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Summarizing the Essay

Objectives

1. to summarize an essay in one concise sentence
2. to recognize that summary sentences have a uniform structure
3. to apply the uniform structure of summary sentences as a pattern for summarizing any essay
4. to help readers abstract an essay's meaning by constructing summary sentences according to the uniform structure

12

PREASSIGNMENT

The students are asked to read George Orwell's (1954) essay "Shooting an Elephant" before class. They are required to write a one-sentence summary of the essay, which they will be required to read in class. The instructor gives no directions as to how the summaries are to be written.

FOR THE TEACHER

"If you can't put your idea on the back of a calling card," Broadway producer David Belasco once said, "you haven't got an idea." In two hours or two class sessions, this chapter demonstrates how to put an essay's idea into one fairly concise summary sentence. Summarizing is the first, and also the most necessary, step in the workshop process.

The workshop process focuses on the analysis of an essay's effectiveness, of how an essay's form and content work together to make meaning. It is important to note that a workshop differs from an interpretation precisely in the use of "how" as the primary question. As noted earlier, workshops investigate technique (how), interpretations investigate meanings (what). Workshops assume that the meaning is known to the group. But in order to substantiate that assumption, summary sentences are required. The primary function, then, of summary sentences is to make an essay's tacitly assumed meaning explicit.

But this chapter does not just demonstrate how to express an idea concisely; it also demonstrates how to discover an essay's point. Every instructor experiences

classes in which even the best students miss an essay's meaning. Students are not so much careless readers as they are inexperienced at abstracting meaning. Until now, we have had only two ways for instructors to proceed: they could either state the essay's point or make the students guess it. With either method, the majority of workshop time is spent rereading the essay for passages that justify the abstract meaning. Such explication shoves aside the workshop's primary purpose.

This chapter offers a third alternative by which students can abstract the meaning of an essay, or of any piece of prose. This alternative is the uniform structure of summary sentences. The uniform structure requires that students not so much reread essays as remember an essay's salient information. The structure attaches specific information to specific locations within one sentence. In placing information, the summary writer's attention is directed to the essay's point.

The steps in demonstrating how to compose a summary sentence and to discover an essay's point are simple.

As a first step, the instructor asks the students to read their summaries aloud. This reading usually indicates that students have missed the essay's general point. It is also likely to present a number of conflicting summaries. In either case, the students will remember salient information that they cannot fit into what they perceive as the essay's point.

The second step is an analysis of a professionally written summary sentence. Generalizations about the sample produce the uniform structure.

In the third step, the uniform structure is applied to a typical summary sentence. The structure demands certain modifications to the typical sentence, and these modifications show both how a summary can be written and how the point of an essay can be derived by writing a summary.

EXERCISES

Demonstrating the Need for Summaries

The preassigned Orwell essay functions nicely for this demonstration. "Shooting an Elephant" describes how Orwell is forced to kill a valuable and harmless elephant simply to save face before the natives. He does not want to shoot the elephant, but the natives expect it of him. And because he represents the British government, Orwell must appear resolute before the colonial Burmese. The essay's point is that, when a government becomes imperialist, it destroys its own freedom; it operates to impress the natives, to save face. The shooting of an elephant is a concrete instance from which Orwell derives the essay's abstract point.

The instructor begins by explaining the exercise's long-range application. Before an essay can be analyzed, its analysts must know what it is about. Also, an accurate summary is a scale model whose logic mirrors that of the essay.

What this means to the group is that, in the case of professionally written samples like Orwell's, the summary is a prerequisite to the primary question workshops ask of every essay: "*How* does the essay say what the summary indicates it says?" The students compare the summary to the essay as they analyze the larger work for techniques and strategies useful in their own compositions.

With this long-range goal established, the instructor states that the exercise will focus on finding an accurate summary of Orwell's essay and, in the process, looking at how summary sentences are composed. The instructor has students read aloud their assigned summary sentences. A summary is written on the blackboard.

Since most of the sentences will describe the motives behind Orwell's shooting of the elephant, but few will connect those motives to Orwell's abstract point, almost any sentence may be chosen for the blackboard. A typical sentence might read:

A policeman shoots an elephant to avoid embarrassing himself in front of the natives.

If some summaries conflict in terms of the focus or the details included, the instructor notes important differences on the blackboard. In any case, the instructor asks whether anything else important is missing from the sentence and makes a list of the omissions on the blackboard. Here is a partial list of likely omissions:

- the point that the elephant is no longer dangerous
- the fact that the policeman does not like his job because of the "dirty work of empire"
- the fact that the policeman hates Burmese because they hate him
- the irony of the last sentence in the essay

If all these things are important, the instructor says to the students, "Then the summary is inaccurate." After requesting that each student revise the summary to include important missing elements, the instructor may get something like this:

A British policeman, who doesn't like his job because of the dirty work of Empire and who is secretly all for the Burmese but hates them because they hate him, shoots an elephant to avoid embarrassing himself in front of the natives, but ends up a fool because the elephant was no longer dangerous.

Even if the group has not performed the exercises in Chapter 7, "Sentences," it will recognize how cumbersome this sentence is. But, as the instructor points out,

before a sentence can be revised, the group needs to know what goes into a summary sentence. The best way to find out is to analyze a sample.

Analyzing Professional Summaries for Uniform Structure

For the sake of brevity, this section analyzes only one professional nonfiction summary sentence. Since there is a structural distinction between nonfiction and fiction summaries, a fiction summary (in this case a movie summary) is also presented. However, once that distinction is made, the section focuses on the structure of nonfiction summary sentences.

This analytic procedure asks the students to make generalizations about the information in the professional summary. Since the generalizations stem from one specific sample, the structure is described inductively; but, once the structure is established, it can be applied deductively. That is, it can be applied as a general rule for constructing any summary of an essay.

There are two good and readily accessible sources of summaries—*TV Guide*, and the best-seller lists in book review magazines such as the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post Book World*. These sources usually do admirable and concise justice to their subjects. Although the following discussion relies on the cited examples, instructors may want to use more current examples. Also, some students may want to look at a larger number of samples before generalizing about uniform structure.

First, the instructor hands out reproductions of summary sentences or writes them on the board. Here is one from *TV Guide* (1982):

“The Wolf Man.” (1941) Lon Chaney Jr. portrays the title role in this familiar Jekyll-Hyde tale about a man who suffers the bite of a were-wolf and its consequences. (p. A-17)¹

And here is a nonfiction summary from the *Washington Post Book World* (1982):

The Money Lenders by Anthony Sampson . . . Rich as Croesus, the cabal of conservatively tailored men who rule the financial world with a less than steady hand. (p. 13)²

After noting this summary’s problem with subject-verb agreement, the instructor asks what purposes these summaries serve. Obviously, professional summa-

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²Reprinted from *Washington Post Book World* with permission of the *Washington Post*, © 1982.

ries make people curious about a book or movie; they raise questions that make people want to read or watch.

What major question, the instructor asks, does each summary raise? Students should not have much difficulty finding two different questions—one for each summary—but, if they hesitate, the instructor can remind them of the sentence analysis performed in Chapter 5, “Beginnings.” Like the first sentences of essays, summaries raise questions about information that is *omitted*: who, what, where, when, why, and how. As Norman Maclean (1976) says, “All there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren’t noticing which makes you see something that isn’t even visible” (p. 92).³

The first summary raises a major question of fiction and movies: “*What happens next?*” Beyond an initial situation (i.e., “bite of a were-wolf”), the movie summary provides little or no information about action, the “what” of journalism’s famous questions. The “Wolf Man” summary makes readers want to know what happens after the bite. In terms of action, what are the “consequences”?

The second summary raises a major question that is important to the exercise: “*How does this happen?*” Information typically omitted from nonfiction summary sentences has to do with *how* the subsequent action happens and *why* the action happens. Thus, the major distinction between fiction and nonfiction summaries is that a fiction summary provides incomplete action and raises a question about subsequent events, while a nonfiction summary always provides complete action and raises a qualitatively different question—one of means or method for carrying out all the events.

The instructor can now focus the group’s attention on the summary of Sampson’s book, leaving fiction summaries aside. The students are requested to specify which information is provided in the Sampson summary. They are also requested to categorize specific passages from the summary. Since the object of the exercise is not to memorize the category labels provided below but to recognize the uniform structure, the instructor may solicit group-generated labels. The instructor may explain or solicit an explanation of each category as it is created.

Information Categories

The information provided in nonfiction summaries can be put into one of three categories:

1. *Major characters*: a “cabal of . . . men.” This category is self-evident. The people mentioned in the summary are the major characters.
2. *Initiating situation (circumstances)*: “rich as Croesus” . . . “cabal.” This category illustrates how some portions of a summary serve double duty in

³Reprinted from *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* by Norman Maclean by permission of The University of Chicago Press, © 1976 by The University of Chicago.

the interest of brevity. Sampson's "cabal" is not just a group of major characters. "Cabal" also describes the situation this group is in at the book's beginning. These major characters are in a conspiracy. The situation of being in a conspiracy also creates the book's initiating action: they are conspiring. Similarly, the phrase "rich as Croesus" establishes both character trait and situation. Because these are rich men, the action will center around dealing with money. It is important for the class to understand that nothing can begin if the major characters are not in a specific situation. The initiating situation, then, is the circumstances of the major characters; the circumstances begin the action.

3. *Condensed action*: "rule the financial world with a less than steady hand." This category provides information that does not allow the reader to ask "what happens next?" Condensed action tells what happens next and what happens last; it tells the whole event. These two aspects deserve a closer look: While condensed action tells what happens next in a general sense ("rule . . . with a less than steady hand"), it does not detail the individual steps in the action (e.g., one cabal member might bankrupt his company). Condensed action also tells what happens last; it provides the action's conclusion. The conclusion is that the cabal is not doing the best job in the financial world. Thus, with the whole event included in the summary, the reader's attention is directed away from what is told (what happens next) to what is not told (primarily, *how* it happens).

Before analyzing the summary for omitted information, the group must be aware of balance in a summary sentence. *Circumstances that begin action are also present at its conclusion.* A "cabal" of men who are "rich as Croesus" is balanced by the conclusion's mention of "rule the financial world." Another way of putting this is to say that circumstances that begin action also end it.

The instructor now asks the students to identify information that is omitted from the summary. The students must phrase questions about the omissions using passages from the summary. Again, this omitted information must be categorized. And, again, there are three categories: means, motivation, and definition.

The first category concerns the means by which (how) the condensed action occurs. How does a "cabal" rule "with a less than steady hand"? This category contains questions that connect the initiating situation to the conclusion. As noted above, the conclusion is one aspect of the condensed action. So the heart of the question is, "*How does the initiating situation cause the condensed action?*" The summary sentence can be imagined as a map with a starting point (initiating situation) and a destination (concluded action) but no route mapped between. The summary omits the route (how) with the intention of making readers curious about it. We have been told where we are and where we are going, but not *how* we are going.

Getting there is all the fun. And, usually, writers take the scenic routes. What this means to the instructor is that, as students begin phrasing questions about other information omitted from the summary, the divisions between categories will begin to blur. Questions of motivation (why) may raise questions of definition, and questions in both categories will refer to questions of means (how). Here are some motivation and definition questions students might compose about the Sampson summary. With respect to motivation: Why does the “cabal” want to rule unsteadily? Why does the “cabal” want to rule? With regard to definition: What is a “cabal”? Why is there a cabal? Why does a cabal rule?

There are more questions of course, but the point the instructor needs to make about these blurring categories is that writing is economical. That is, everything happens at once; sentences and chapters, like the words of a summary sentence, serve double duty. In fact, readers *expect* to learn through following the action. Definitions and motivations, the reader expects, will reveal themselves as the book shows *how* the action unfolds.

For instance, all the questions above require a definition of “cabal” before they can be answered. Readers expect that early in Sampson’s book a definition of cabal will be presented *while* the author demonstrates *how* the money lenders act. Similarly, readers expect the money lenders’ acts to reveal motivations. By seeing *how* these men act, readers expect to understand *why* they act. This is part of Aristotle’s formulation of drama: character (motivation or why) is revealed in action.

Thus, “how” is the primary category of omitted information. When the group understands this, it is ready to formulate a uniform structure for nonfiction summary sentences.

The Uniform Structure of Nonfiction Summary Sentences

The instructor asks for a tentative formula for such a structure that the group modifies by consensus, adding and deleting phrases for succinctness and utility. The completed structure looks like this:

major characters
+
initiating situation



condensed action

Omitted:

1. How (means)
2. Why (motivation)
3. definitions

The instructor demonstrates this structure by applying it to the Sampson summary:



- Omitted:
1. How rule with a less than steady hand?
 2. Why rule that way?
 3. What is a “cabal”? What is an “unsteady hand”?

The phrases “rich as Croesus” and “conservatively tailored” modify the major characters and their situation, giving hints about the omitted information.

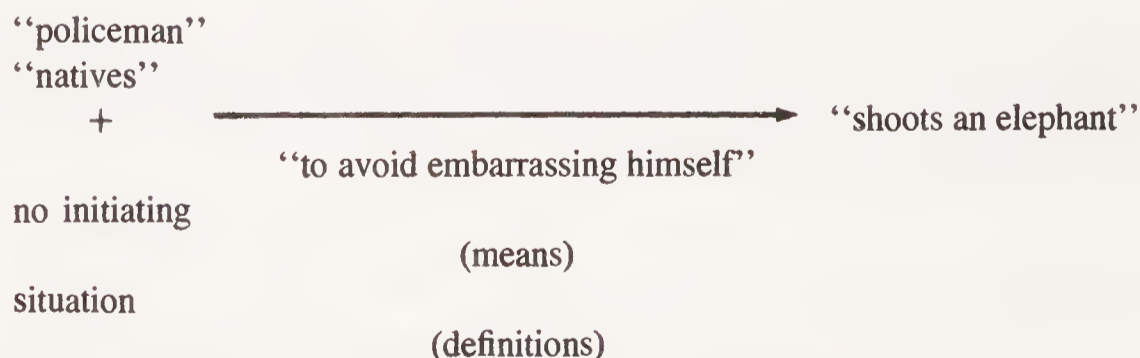
Applying the Uniform Summary Structure

A group-generated structure resembling the above sample can now be applied to the Orwell summary sentence. The procedure is simple. Following the example above, the original summary is broken down into its constituents. This reveals the presence or absence of information corresponding to the uniform structure’s categories. Then the group modifies the sentence to conform with the structure.

The original summary of Orwell’s essay reads:

A policeman shoots an elephant to avoid embarrassing himself in front of the natives.

The group should have no trouble breaking this down.



Obviously, there are several things wrong with this summary. There is no initiating situation, and the motivation (why) is provided when it should be omitted. Most important to the instructor, the group has not yet connected to Orwell’s abstract point. The beauty of the uniform summary structure is that it can be employed as a means of working from specifics (the shooting of the elephant) out to points of greater significance (Orwell’s discovery of imperialism’s nature).

The first step for the group is to delete information that, according to the uniform structure, should be omitted. With motivation removed, the summary now reads:

A policeman shoots an elephant in front of the natives.

The most obvious result of this revision is that the deletion of motivation does not raise the question of motivation. The sentence becomes a flat statement of fact indicating nothing unusual about the event. The strongest question this new sentence raises is “So what?”

Temporarily, the instructor leaves the problem of omitted information and asks instead for the initiating situation. Some students may suggest “in front of the natives.” Indeed, the phrase indicates a part of the initiating situation, but not all of it. The phrase is not specific enough. Now the instructor begins a short chain of questions that lead toward the essay’s point by asking, “What’s important about standing in front of the natives?”

A student may reply that, because Orwell is in front of the natives, he has to shoot the elephant. Why? To avoid embarrassing himself. How would he be embarrassed if he didn’t shoot? He would appear irresolute and uncertain; he would not be doing what the natives expect, and they would laugh at him. Why is that unacceptable? Because Orwell—being a policeman—is supposed to be in charge. Who put Orwell in charge? The British government. And how could the British government put him in charge in a foreign country? Obviously, because Burma is a colony of the British empire.

Another approach might begin with “How did Orwell come to be standing in front of the natives?” and work toward the same conclusion. Now, the initiating situation is *not* standing before the natives but the problem of being an alien authority; the initiating situation is that Orwell is a British colonial officer. The elephant could not be shot if Orwell were not in Burma and if he were not compelled to prove his authority to a colonized people.

Thus, the summary sentence is rewritten to include the initiating situation.

A British colonial officer shoots an elephant in front of the natives.

With this, the instructor can return to the problem of motivation. What, the instructor asks again, is the relationship between the initiating situation and Orwell’s reason for shooting the elephant? Orwell is compelled to shoot even though he does not want to; he is *forced* to shoot. The group can revise the sentence again, this time to make it ask why.

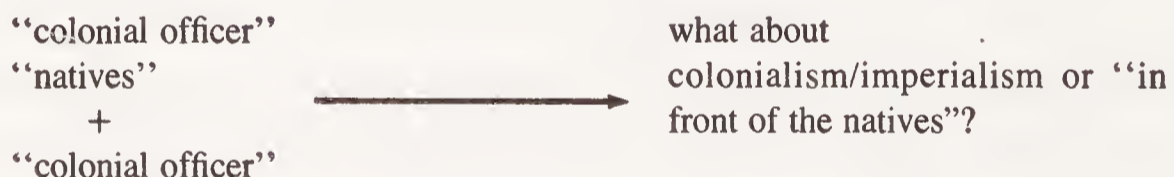
A British colonial officer is forced to shoot an elephant in front of the natives.

Students should note independently the importance of this change. By raising the question, “Why is he forced to shoot the elephant?” the group has also raised the question, “How is he forced to shoot the elephant?” The focus of the action has changed.

The instructor can request that the students explain this new focus. The revised sentence no longer concentrates on asking how the elephant is shot, but on how Orwell is *forced* to shoot the elephant. And, as a result of asking how Orwell is forced, the condensed action now concentrates not on the shooting, but on the question of forcing.

Now the instructor asks if the summary is balanced, reminding the group that in the Sampson summary the circumstances that begin the action (a cabal of rich men) are present at its conclusion (rule the financial world). But the Orwell summary, as the students can see, is unbalanced. The circumstances that initiate the action (“colonial officer”) are not mentioned in the conclusion (“is forced to shoot an elephant in front of the natives”).

It might be argued that “in front of the natives” implies colonialism, but, even if this is the case, the phrase concludes no action involving colonialism. At least one student should realize that simply being forced to shoot an elephant says nothing meaningful about imperialism. If no student mentions this, the instructor can write a tentative structure on the board:



The most obvious aspect of this structure is that it forces the group to ask where “forced to shoot an elephant” belongs. The obvious answer is that the phrase is an individual step or detail of the condensed action. The condensed action must have something more abstract to say about colonialism; the summary needs a conclusion. Just as the Sampson summary concludes that the cabal of rich men who rule the financial world isn’t doing a good job, the Orwell summary must say something about the situation of British colonial officers. Otherwise, it will not be balanced.

As the short series of questions about Orwell’s circumstances showed, the connection between being a British colonial officer and being forced to shoot the elephant is the problem of authority—who is supposed to be in charge and who is really in charge? The instructor asks the group what it means to be in authority, yet to act at the will of supposedly authorityless people.

This is the point at which students’ memories come into play (see the section for the teacher above). The salient information that, earlier, the students could not fit

into what they perceived as the essay's point begins to make sense. Most likely, the students will remember specific passages from the text.

Two typical passages come from the essay's third and seventh paragraphs. Orwell (1954) writes, "It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism—the real motives for which despotic governments act" (p. 149). And, "I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys" (p. 152).⁴ The students need not quote these lines, only present an approximation of the ideas.

Now the summary sentence can be revised for the final time. The instructor may ask each student to write a version that will then be read aloud, or the group can revise the sentence on the blackboard. With either approach, the final version can take many forms. Here are three possibilities:

A British colonial officer glimpses the real nature of imperialism.

A British colonial officer, forced to shoot an elephant, glimpses the real nature of imperialism.

A British colonial officer realizes that imperialism is a tyranny that destroys his own freedom.

The first summary's advantage is that it completely omits the detail of shooting the elephant while raising a definition question (what is the real nature of imperialism?), a "means" question (how does he glimpse the real nature of imperialism?), and a motivation question (why does he glimpse the real nature of imperialism?). The first summary also works in conjunction with the essay title to ask the question, How is shooting an elephant connected to the real nature of imperialism?

The second summary has the same advantage, but also reveals the specific incident. This revelation shifts the focus slightly toward the incident and away from the essay's point. The third summary states the conclusion so succinctly and clearly that it may discourage readers from going on. The only question it raises is about the connection between the title and the realization. However, the last summary's advantage is that almost everything is stated explicitly; in a workshop situation, all the essay analysts would know from this summary precisely the essay's point. There can be no confusion. (Consequently, there may also be no excitement of discovery.)

In any event, each summary captures the essence of the essay, especially when used in conjunction with the title. The reader/analyst now knows the point of the essay and the event that will make that point.

⁴Excerpts from "Shooting an Elephant" in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* by George Orwell are reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.; copyright 1950 by Sonia Brownell Orwell, renewed 1978 by Sonia Pitt-Rivers.

CONCLUSION

Having demonstrated to itself that the Orwell essay can be summarized in one concise sentence, the group is ready now to proceed with an analysis of the essay.

More importantly, the group now has a tool for composing summary sentences. The uniform summary sentence structure allows readers to identify the major aspects of any essay: characters, action, and conclusion. It also allows readers to determine which details of means, motivation, and definition will be important to the essay. Those important details are found in the questions raised by the summary sentence.

The uniform summary sentence structure is also useful for students during revision (see the section on strengthening your prose in Chapter 13 “Revision”). If they experience difficulty finding the subject of an essay, they can apply the structure to a completed first draft. The resulting summary will help indicate the major aspects of the piece; and, based on those indications, the writers can excise extraneous material. Composing a summary for one’s own work is not easy, but persistence will pay off in greater coherence and unity.

A byproduct of applying the uniform summary structure is the discovery that *not all student essays can be summarized*. As the discussion of applying the structure to one’s own work suggests, the inability to summarize usually results when an essay addresses more than one subject or one that is too broad. This difficulty presents some interesting possibilities for workshop discussion.

The following list of questions will help writers compose nonfiction summary sentences.

- Who are the major characters?
- What are the major characters’ circumstances at the essay’s beginning? (initiating situation)
- How do these circumstances create the essay’s events? (condensed action)
- How are those circumstances involved in the essay’s conclusion? (condensed action)
- How do the essay’s events come to happen? (means or methods)
- Why do the major characters act? (motivation)
- What circumstances, events, and other particulars does the essay explain? (definition)
- What is the essay’s conclusion or main point? (condensed action)
- Does your summary sentence raise questions of means, motivation, and definition that the essay answers?

POSTASSIGNMENT

There is no specific postassignment for this chapter other than to have the students prepare summary sentences for each professional and student essay discussed in the workshop. Of course, the instructor must reinforce this assignment by routinely asking each member of the group to read the summary aloud. As the year goes on, the students will come to consider this summarizing a part of every assignment, and the instructor will find the summaries a useful departure point for discussions.

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Chapter 13

Revision

Objectives

1. to demonstrate the need for revision
2. to define revision as “re-seeing” and “re-thinking”
3. to examine methods of tactical and strategic revision

13

PREASSIGNMENTS

This chapter's sections may be used at different times during the term. Pre-assignments, if any, are located at the beginning of each section.

FOR THE TEACHER

“It is in rewriting that writers are made,” Ernest Hemingway claimed. This chapter not only demonstrates the importance of revision but also examines some useful methods to be applied by students in revising. Because the class as a whole evaluates the results of most of the following revision exercises, each student sees that rewriting does improve the quality of prose, and that rewriting helps writers to succeed.

To understand how revision works, instructors must understand the whole composing process. Research by Sondra Perl (1980) suggests that writing is a two-part process. The first part, which is writer-based, is called “retrospective structuring.” According to Perl and Egendorf (1979), in retrospective structuring the writer looks back at what has been written in order to see what needs to be written. In “projective structuring,” the process's second, reader-based part, the writer “must ‘project’ whether readers, who do not have access to the sense evoked in the writer by the writer's own words on the page, will nonetheless grasp what the writer intends to say” (p. 126).

Obviously, then, the first draft of an essay is primarily retrospective structuring, while revisions are primarily projective structuring. The implications of the

different emphases lead Perl and Egendorf (1979) to a statement with which we concur: “*We categorically insist that rules for judging products must not be confused with guidelines for producing such products* [italics theirs] (p. 127). This means that student writers should not be overly concerned with the technicalities of form (grammar, punctuation, etc.) in the first draft. In fact, research by Perl (1979, p. 333) concludes that premature technical editing breaks down the rhythms of thinking and writing, often resulting in students losing track of their ideas. Even during revision, an emphasis on technical errors teaches students that writing is merely a matter of presenting the correct form, that ideas are almost unimportant. If teachers want essays that are perfect in form and perfectly joyless, they need only assign simple-minded recopying of corrections.

Unfortunately for most writing classes at the secondary and college level, the damage has already been done. Most students are already convinced that rewriting means correcting and recopying. To break out of this fixated student response, the revision exercises in this chapter do not initially consider technical editing, what Perl (1979) calls “primarily an exercise in error-hunting” (p. 333). Rather, the first exercise involves finding an essay’s true subject; the second exercise demonstrates how to shape that subject. Later exercises look at tactical revision, which includes but is not limited to technical corrections.

Our experience has shown that these revision exercises usually need to be performed in the order they are presented below. However, not all writing classes will need all of these exercises, and no two writing classes will need to employ the exercises in the indicated order. Some instructors may find students lapsing into old habits, at which time a particular exercise may be more appropriate as reinforcement than as an initiation of a particular approach to revision.

Instructors should, however, note that our order of presentation coincides with that suggested by Perl and Egendorf (1979), who suggest a two-phase sequence in revising (p. 133). In the first phase, students revise for logic and coherence. In the second, they revise with an eye to what the reader needs to know. Of course, our intent is eventually to integrate both phases into a simultaneous revision process that takes place before an essay is submitted to the teacher.

Finally, these exercises are constructed in agreement with James Moffett’s contention in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1968, chap. 2) that the important unit of discourse is the whole unit, the essay. Though logistical practicalities sometimes prohibit the use of a whole essay in these exercises, instructors must never let their classes forget that smaller units of discourse are components of a whole unit, components that will not function individually, that must be related to other components in a whole unit in order to function at all. This sense of smaller units functioning within a whole is what integrates all the chapters of this book.

The essence of this book is revision. By performing each chapter’s exercises, your students learn that the first word or sentence or essay structure they write down is not necessarily the best. In most of the present chapter’s exercises,

students have the opportunity to apply the revision techniques they have learned. Most of the exercises require a workshop-like evaluation of revisions, which reinforces successful application.

The tacit assumption of all workshops (see Chapter 11, “How a Workshop Works”) is that no essay is ever finished. Thus, revision is an assumed necessity for each essay. However, the type and degree of revision an essay requires change as student writers develop more complete manuscripts. While successive revision exercises are cumulative, they are cumulative in an odd way. Instructors are likely to see less application of the early exercises in this chapter and more of the later ones. Regard this as a sign of student development.

EXERCISES

Finding Your Subject

Assignment

The students are asked to compose an essay in a minimum of three pages and to be prepared to read it aloud. The instructor assigns either a subject or a form, depending on the material the class discusses on the day of the assignment.

Purpose

By performing this exercise early in the term, the students learn that the audience for essays is larger than the teacher, thus setting the tone for the remaining classes. The students also demonstrate to each other how to view their texts from each other’s perspective—the primary requirement for projective structuring. As with all workshop activities, this exercise also moves the teacher from the center of attention, thus reinforcing the idea of a student-centered class. The students themselves reward each other for their successes while ignoring the error-hunting of simple correction.

Perhaps the most important application of this exercise is for students who have difficulty finding a writing topic. The exercise identifies the writer’s subject even when the writer cannot. The instructor has merely to require that each student write three pages, whether a specific subject is in mind or not.

Procedure

The teacher requests that a composition be read aloud. Following the reading, classmates are asked to mention a specific part of the text that they remember. This does not mean summarizing the content of the entire essay. Rather, it means citing a specific passage that is memorable. After several passages have been identified, the group’s task is to explain why each is memorable.

The teacher acts only as a facilitator. In James Moffett's words, the teacher "helps students to interpret their initially vague responses and to translate them into the technical features of the paper that gave rise to them" (p. 196). In other words, classmates reward the writer for applying the kinds of technical features learned in Part II of this book. The teacher need only "interpret" and "translate" any technical features from Part II that have not yet been covered.

Here are some general questions to facilitate discussion:

- What specific words, phrases, and sentences do you remember?
- What specific pictures, images, and actions do you remember?
- What dialogue do you remember?
- How does this passage relate to the whole essay?

The last question is difficult to answer, since early in the term students tend to include warm-up paragraphs at the beginnings of their essays. But this is exactly the point of the exercise.

For instance, we usually assign the essay topic "Explain how it feels to be verbally gifted" early in the term. This topic requires considerable introspection and usually produces a great deal of drab prose intended to please the teacher. The memorable passages in such essays may describe the discomfort of being singled out as gifted in a heterogeneous class at school. The preceding paragraphs may be the usual recitation of advantages of being gifted—true, but joyless, because that is not what the writer *feels*. In this case, the writer fulfills the obligation of the assignment by writing until feelings and subject emerge together. The relation to the whole essay is the relation to the topic, and the author has succeeded, finally, at narrowing a general assignment to a manageable topic: how it feels to be *singled out* as verbally gifted. In this way, the instructor should point out, students who write long enough may write themselves out of a blank corner.

Now the teacher has several other students read their papers aloud. At the end of each reading, questions similar to those above are asked. Eventually, the students perceive common patterns of diction, syntax, and essay structure in all the compositions. After three or four readings, they will begin volunteering (or the instructor may request) patterns.

Initially, the important patterns revolve around what makes a passage memorable. Two patterns most easily noted are (1) vivid words, phrases, or sentences that produce memorable pictures, images, or actions; and (2) dialogue that makes characters come alive. These two patterns can be found in any rough draft, as the class confirms by switching papers and marking the memorable passages.

This done, the teacher takes a count of where in each essay the memorable passages first occur. We have found that, almost without exception, these passages occur near the essay's midpoint. Thus, a third pattern emerges: The first part of a first draft is usually a warm-up. This pattern points to a conclusion so obvious

that its enunciator will feel foolish. Even though the beginning paragraphs are only a warm-up, there is no way to find your subject without writing them, for there is no way to reach the midpoint of an essay without writing the whole essay. Writers will only recognize their subject—the narrowed topic—by applying the first two patterns to a *whole essay*.

Exceptions to the third pattern fall into two categories: (1) Essays with no memorable passages are the works either of sadly stultified students or of highly-skilled writers with no discernible topic; both types need a private conference. (2) Essays that begin with memorable passages and falter only occasionally or not at all demonstrate that, in the prewriting stage, some students may have worked through the warm-up in their heads. These students, and those whose subject has been found, are ready to move on to the next assignment.

Shaping Your Subject

Assignment

The students are asked to outline the essay distributed for today's workshop and to be prepared to write the outline on the blackboard. This assignment is most efficient when used in conjunction with an essay to be workshopped (see Chapter 11, "How a Workshop Works"), since each student will have a copy of the text in hand. However, instructors may prefer to have the students switch papers and outline those in class, using only one student's outline of the workshop essay as a demonstration model. The advantage of this alternative is that each student has an outline applied to a specific essay and also a model outline of the workshopped essay, both of which can be taken home as examples.

Purpose

Once the students have practiced distancing themselves from their texts and have developed a method for finding their subject, as in the previous exercise, they are ready to evaluate other drafts for logic, coherence, and proportion. This exercise allows writers to map what they have already written. It assumes, with Perl and Egendorf (1979) that " 'outlining' *follows* rather than precedes initial writing" (p. 131). Reversing the usual order frees students from the straightjacket of a predetermined plan, thus ending the frustration that arises when ideas unaccounted for in the plan are generated in the act of composing.

Procedure

Instructors may find it useful to have a student demonstrate outlining before the class performs the assignment. The focus of this exercise is not on perfecting outline techniques, but students need a passing familiarity with them. Once

written outlines have been brought to class, the teacher selects a student to write one on the blackboard. The sample outline below (which also appears in Chapter 10, “Endings”) is rudimentary but serves well enough. The assignment was to describe and solve a problem. This student chose heavy homework loads as a problem. The outline lists the topic of each of five paragraphs:

1. describes the general structure of “vicious-cycle” problems.
2. describes teachers’ aims in assigning excessive homework.
3. describes students’ distressed responses (poor quality, work not done) and the alarmed teachers’ response of escalating the homework load.
4. compares the vicious cycle of homework load to the general structure of “vicious-cycle” problems.
5. proposes a solution to the homework load problem.

Clearly, most of this essay describes the problem. Only one paragraph—the concluding paragraph at that—proposes a solution. The essay’s last half needs expansion to restore proportion.

The schematic presentation of topics also allows writers to check logical flow. If Items 3 and 4 above were transposed, the writer would have seen immediately that the sequence was incorrect. Coherence, too, is easily checked. For instance, a paragraph that dealt with the intricacies of a particular teacher’s grading system would be easily identified as irrelevant.

Eventually, outlining after the first draft becomes an automatic part of each student’s revision process. The essays that the teacher sees will need less and less of the kind of major structural changes that the above two exercises demonstrate. After a certain point, revision will become a matter of line-by-line work.

Strengthening Your Prose

Assignment

The instructor distributes students’ essays to different students and requires (1) revision using the techniques discussed in Chapter 7, “Sentences,” and (2) the writing of one sentence summarizing the point of the essay. The purpose of sentence-by-sentence revision will be clear after the class has performed the exercises in Chapter 7. The one-sentence summary (see Chapter 12, “Summarizing the Essay”) helps the reviser by providing a concise statement that acts as a scale model from which to reconstruct a more complete essay. The summary helps the author of the original gauge how well the essay’s point was originally made, and it helps both author and instructor estimate how well the revision harmonizes with the original intention. For instance, a summary will show whether a serious essay has been turned comic.

Purpose

With both the original and the revision in hand, the instructor may demonstrate the revision process in several ways, as shown below. But first it is important to understand that the above assignment represents the whole revision process that every writer performs on each draft of every essay. This process has three steps: (1) the composition of a summary sentence, (2) the evaluation of the essay in terms of the summary, and (3) the line-by-line revision of the essay in accordance with the evaluation. The first step asks of a retrospectively structured, writer-based text (see the section for the teacher, above), What has been said? The second step asks a projectively structured, reader-based question: What needs to be said? The third step resolves any disparity between Step one and Step two.

While most writers do not commit Steps one and two to paper when revising their own work, common sense indicates that the steps do indeed take place mentally. Thus, by asking revisers to write a summary sentence, a model of someone else's revision process is provided to the original author.

Procedure 1—Evaluating the Essay

This procedure is almost never necessary after “finding your subject” and “shaping your subject,” but occasionally a reviser will still be unable to construct a summary sentence. Less likely, though possible, the summary sentence, through no fault of the reviser, will bear no resemblance to the actual essay. Both of these difficulties usually result when an essay addresses more than one subject or one that is too broad.

For example, an essay on “how it feels to be verbally gifted” that employs a circular structure (for more on this structure, see the section on signaling the end in Chapter 10, “Endings”) might cause such difficulties. The struggling reviser might write:

As he goes through the school day, Johnny decides that he feels bad, sad, glad, mad about being verbally gifted.

or

Johnny decides he has feelings about being verbally gifted.

Assuming the reviser has composed a competent summary sentence, the instructor duplicates the original essay (without the author's name, of course) and requests an outline, as was done in “shaping your subject.” With circular structure, which is a return in the last paragraph to a problem presented in the first, the outline of six paragraphs might look like this:

1. Johnny worries in homeroom about how he feels about being verbally gifted in order to write this essay.
2. In the first period, Teacher A makes Johnny feel bad for correcting a math error Teacher A made on the blackboard.
3. In the second period, Teacher B apologizes to Johnny because the material doesn't challenge him enough.
4. In the third period, Teacher C praises Johnny for outstanding work, making him glad.
5. In the fourth period, Teacher D presents stimulating and challenging work that makes Johnny mad that all his classes aren't like this.
6. At the end of the day, Johnny decides that he has many feelings about being verbally gifted.

Both summary sentences cover the essay as well as no summary at all. The author has written about so many feelings that the essay cannot be specific about any of them and thus is too broad. And yet, because Johnny's circumstances have not changed at the essay's end—as, indeed, circumstances usually will not with circular structure—the second summary is accurately written. In cases such as this, the original essay must be read aloud, as was done in “Finding Your Subject,” and sent back for structural revision.

Procedure 2—Interlinear Revision

When the instructor finds a particularly strong revision, it may be reproduced interlinearly. It is necessary to stress that such a reproduction is only an excerpt that must function within a whole essay; in order to demonstrate this, opening paragraphs ordinarily make good examples.

The opening paragraphs below are from an essay by CTY student Jacinda Sampson that was revised by Stephanie Blank. Jacinda's original is underlined, while the words and punctuation that Stephanie retained in her revision are printed as directly beneath their original as is typographically possible.

Student Sample 1

Erika is my “psychiatrist.” She is probably my best
 I met Erika, my psychiatrist and best
friend, but the only problem is she lives in Laurel, which
 friend,
is over forty miles away.

I met Erika at the Center for Advanced Studies, but
 at the Center for Advanced Studies, but

I didn't know her well until she invited me to the "tea party"
 I didn't know her until she invited me to the tea party
 at room 231. The "tea party" or "second-floor restaurant" was
 in room 231. This "second-floor restaurant" was
 open from 4:00 (or whenever computer class was dismissed)
 open for business from the time computer class was dismissed
 until 6:00
 until 6:00. It was a cove of security
 for "troubled students frustrated over Greek verbs, computer
 for "troubled students frustrated over Greek verbs, computer
 consoles, or French kids in need of a substitute for the
 consoles, or French verbs." It was an escape for those who
 inedible tradition called supper, the homesick,
 gagged on camp dinners, those who were homesick,
 or anyone in need of sociable company."
 or those in need of company. I fit into every
 category.

Jacinda produced some lively prose in this essay, which describes her friend Erika. Stephanie performed both strategic and tactical revisions on the essay, revisions that strengthened Jacinda's prose. Strategically, Stephanie merged the two paragraphs, deleting "but the only problem is she lives in Laurel, which is over forty miles away." This half of the original's first sentence makes an apparent contract with the reader to focus the essay on the difficulties of seeing Erika, yet the second paragraph makes it clear that the essay will focus on Erika's character. The other strategic revision Stephanie made was to add a final sentence to the merged paragraphs. This sentence provides a transition into the rest of the essay as well as a rationale for getting to know Erika.

Tactically, Stephanie made the usual punctuation corrections (e.g., reducing use of quotation marks) and tightened up a syntactically difficult sentence. More noteworthy, however, is the substitution of "in" for "at" room 231 and the use of stronger verbs ("gagged"). Note also the rather successful use of parallelism at the paragraph's end.

While the revision is only eight words shorter, the prose is considerably stronger, retaining the excitement of the original yet reading more clearly and smoothly.

Procedure 3—Paragraph Comparison

The instructor may also wish to reproduce paragraphs in order to discuss unity and coherence. Visually, this kind of comparison is easier to read, but additions

and deletions are more difficult to recognize word by word. Thus, the focus here is on a larger unit of meaning.

The paragraph below comes from an essay by CTY student Sibby Hebb entitled “Three Basic Needs for Survival,” which was revised by Jacinda Sampson.

Student Sample 2

Original

A hobby is necessary to my happy survival because I need some activity, outside of school, which interests me. My schoolwork is generally interesting, but it is not the way I'd like to spend my Saturday afternoons. My hobby is photography. I can spend hours taking or developing pictures and not get bored. This is important to me because it gives me an opportunity to think about something other than school, which is what the majority of my time is based on. Photography serves also as my unwinding tool. When I get upset or mad, I go out and take some pictures or spend some time developing. This cools my temper because I'm thinking of something else. I believe everybody needs a hobby like this to survive happily.

Revision

I need a hobby to be happy, so my afterschool hobby is photography. I need an interesting hobby to do in my spare time, or take my mind off school. I like school work, but it's not the way I want to spend my Saturday afternoons. I sometimes spend hours taking and developing pictures, and I never get bored. I need a hobby to distract me when I'm angry, upset or frustrated. If I'm upset about school, which takes up the majority of my time, I'll go and take some pictures or spend some time developing pictures, and my temper will cool off. I think everyone needs a hobby to take her mind off the stress of school. I know *I* couldn't live without a hobby.

Here, Jacinda took some strong elements from a rather disorganized paragraph and put them in a solid structure. Picking up the title of Sibby's essay, Jacinda added the phrase “I need a hobby” and repeated it with some variations throughout the paragraph. Coupled with the repetition of “spend,” as in to spend some time, Jacinda gave the paragraph continuity.

Near the paragraph's midpoint, Jacinda revised the wording to make the writing sound as if it were coming to a conclusion. She added a third element to Sibby's “upset or mad” for the sense of completion: “when I'm angry, upset, or

frustrated.” By tightening up the phrase “which is what the majority of my time is based on” into “which takes up the majority of my time,” she provided the sound of certainty, suggesting that the narrator was no longer developing a topic but reaching conclusions about it. (Note that the phrase remains ambiguous in the revision, however, suggesting the need for even more revision.) Finally, after a long sentence, Jacinda introduced the last variation on her “I need” refrain, much as popular songs often vary their last refrain.

Strategically, both versions maintain their function in the whole essay by tying the final sentence into the essay’s subject.

POSTASSIGNMENT

The revision process is cumulative. In order to demonstrate this, the instructor may wish to have the class develop a revision checklist before the students go home to revise. The instructor should be sure that the list, as it grows, does not become intimidating and thus discouraging. Items on a revision checklist can be merged. For instance, grammar and punctuation can fall under one item labeled “mechanics.”

Of course, having students switch papers for revision doubles the instructor’s grading load. While both the original and the revision must be read, the instructor may find it helpful to write one set of comments addressed to both writer and reviser. Xeroxing or making carbon copies of the comments will reduce the amount of teacher writing. These doubly addressed sets of comments will reinforce the students’ understanding that rough drafts are writer-based—and thus addressed to the original author—but revisions are reader-based—and thus addressed to another person. This other person, eventually, will become the author-as-reader, evaluating the success of the author-as-writer. The revision process will then have been learned.

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Sample Student Essays with Staff Commentary

Exhibit A-1 Student Essay 1

3rd person limited p-o-v
disapprove

Title?

Jane was fourteen when she decided to "Leave
it all behind" *S & W #17 - omit needless words* and set forth to discover what the

world had to offer a teenager in 1966. She

grabbed one of her father's forgotten army

backpacks, into which she attempted to cram all

of her worldly possessions. It didn't work. *good use of short sentence among longies*

She left with what she considered the "bare necessities" *⊖* her best clothes, her worst clothes,

✓ details

dried fruit, a sky blue marble (for luck),

omit cassettes - not many around then

a wide assortment of cassettes--Hendrix, Jefferson

Airplane and the like *⊖* her cassette player, and

S & W #8 - same punctuation for interrupt.

her life savings of \$23.38.

Having planned?

~~After~~ planning an adventurous journey

overseas and all around the big, beautiful world,

when? where? see S & W, p. 25 & omit

Jane woke up to the fact that she must settle for

the life she'd lead for the next 3 years. Many

S & W #14 - Why this passive?

narrow escapes were made from perverted, aggres-

sive pimps, and dopers pushing everything from

Exhibit A-1 continued

good detail, but may be too colloquial in form for general reader

pot to dust. She hated to admit it, but her older sister had been right when she warned her that it wasn't easy to hitch rides here and there

pronoun confusion

without getting hurt. However, after spending several months on the road, Jane became familiar with lines that worked and ones that didn't.

And so she spent the next few years and 9000 miles hitchhiking all over America and Canada.

Later, when asked why she'd left home, and after experiencing "life on the road" first-hand had stayed away from home, her reply was:

good place for S+W+g dashes

"Everyone else seemed to be out 'discovering' themselves, and I wanted to try it. After being gone close to a year, I discovered that I was getting experience in life. I'd've been a fool to return to the life I'd been living."

chronology of this is a bit confusing

you can only get away with this pronoun because it's

But even after the philosophical speech, life didn't get much better. By April of 1969, Jane still hadn't gotten herself a steady job or a place to stay. She was living day to day, never know what came next. And it all hit home

see my comments

would come

Exhibit A-1 continued

when she spent her eighteenth birthday in jail.

She had met some people at an outdoor concert near Philadelphia and afterward they all went out and got drunk. Then Jane "borrowed" a car to do some joy riding in celebration of her birthday. After a few hours the other kids left, but Jane continued to party. At about 2:30 the next morning the cops picked her up for drunk driving and auto theft. After a long, tiresome day in juvenile court (she was still ^{why?} considered a minor), Jane was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months to 2 years in reform school. Here she began to realize that she was becoming an adult and still had no job or responsibilities.

how does one party alone?

see my comments

note sound of these words - trips tongue

crucial implication word

Jane was assigned to kitchen duty, ^{S & W #4} and was released on parole in May, so she went out to look for a job. Although it was difficult to find something due to her original ^{meaning?} record, she finally put her kitchen experience to work and became a dishwasher in a small cafe.

out of sequence, no?

She was later released in the custody of her parole officer on good behavior.

Exhibit A-1 continued

After Jane had saved close to \$600 from her salary, she bought a VW bus for \$250. In this vehicle she traveled to the few places she hadn't been ^{S+W #4} and later lived in it and continued to travel across the U.S. doing odd jobs--picking crops and fruit for farmers and orchard keepers.

a rather inconclusive conclusion

Exhibit A-2 Staff Commentary on Student Essay 1

This is pretty clean writing. A spot of verbosity, an awkward phrase or so, occasional need of more commas, but nothing absolutely embarrassing. Good writing.

However, your disapproval is fairly veiled. You imply rather than state. Your verbs work very subtly. But for the most part, your disapproval rests on the implied values we all share: that adulthood means responsibilities & a job, that living day to day is not a happy way to live, that picking crops is not desirable work. This is true for most people, but for a great many teenagers during the 60's, all the things which you disapprove of were goals of the Hippies. And, in fact, my values are not entirely in disagreement w/them.

Anyhow, I wonder if your facts couldn't've used a little juicing up. For instance, paragraph 5's "She was living day to day, never knowing what came next." How 'bout: "Scraping by one day at a time, she couldn't even see through the night to what morning might bring." Well, it's a little hackneyed, but the idea is to make images which imply your disapproval by trying to be as visual as possible. And the picture has to have the same emotional feeling to it that the tone of the sentence implies. (i.e., "Racing through each day, she had no time to worry about tomorrow.") That sentence has an entirely different feel because of the image. See?

Your 3rd limited p-o-v is, but is also a bit distant, using what Barth calls indirectly quoted or paraphrased consciousness. Some chronology confusion. Good details—vivid & unique, as in paragraph 1—and you need even more. On the whole, good work.

Exhibit A-3 Student Essay 2

Nice word, but see my comments

Ruminations on Verbal Giftedness

The teacher recites each name precisely.

There is a familiar sensation, ^{*need this comma?*} as a cloak of fear

good verbs

twists itself around me. I tear myself from my

a pile of personal pronouns here - reduce

vinyl seat and stumble down the narrow aisle to

stretching for the metaphor

snatch my corrected test paper from the teacher's

slender, unfeeling hands. My seemingly sunburned

too normal a word here

face returns to normal as I gaze at the 'A' in

why blush?

the margin of the paper. I am so relieved that

it isn't a 'D' that I trip over the metal trash

can on the way back to my seat. Twenty-nine

pairs ^{*this word shows the parallelism a bit*} of laughing eyes and identical smirks

follow me as I lower my body into the chair with

a forced smile.

connection?

open arms is usually a welcoming metaphor. Is it the right tone here?

I have to laugh at myself. I complain

ways mean?

about falling behind everyone else into the open

arms of stupidity. Now let me remonstrate about

the caliber of mentality in the cerebral cortex

of an ungifted adolescent. I am convinced some

of my friends have the vocabulary of a flea.

tone? I like, but does it work? It is consistent w/ essay title

When the word "diabolical" is returned with a

Exhibit A-3 continued

your thesaurus has misled you here ✓ dumbfounded "huh?" *look it up* *how to punctuate this?* *does it need a comma too?* *what?* intellectual jargon. Usually, it shoves me into a closet of silence--I'd rather say nothing than *good image ↑* be forever spurring explanations. *transition?*

this could be confusing A teacher may fear the gifted and then become their enemy. Dictionaries, outlines and libraries become abhorred weapons. She is too blind to see their splendor; simple enough only to see their function. Pointless homework assignments antagonize creative thoughts. It is not as though learning these subjects for the first time is unnecessary; it is dull repetition of mastered skills that becomes infuriating. *nice thinking. nice writing.*

absolutely accurate ✓ The teacher must stimulate the imaginations of the gifted or expect to find herself *sexism?* staring into a sea of glazed eyes. *Transition?* *"altho" is overt, yet the connection isn't really clear.*

Although I am classified as verbally gifted, there are days when my pen isn't connected to my brain. I can do nothing but hope words will flow melodically later. Contrary to popular belief, I am not perfect and am correct only 99% of the time. Verbally gifted or not, I'm only human. *tone change?*

Exhibit A-3 continued

Luckily, gifted programs are becoming widespread and I am given the opportunity to fraternize with others like myself. There is a fireside warmth between the gifted. We share feelings of anger, jealousy, fear and love. But, most of all, we share the ultimate understanding of total communication.

again, you're stretching the metaphor. (good point though)

esp? over reaching?

should these be in the order your essay presents them? are they all presented?

*Beautifully done ooo
but see some reservations
in my comments*

Exhibit A-4 Staff Commentary on Student Essay 2

In this version, you're connecting (usually) 1 picture to 1 action, stretching the two over 4 to 8 words, giving us a definite motion, carefully watching that we follow your lead. *Anyone* who wrote this should be proud. It's dangerous to tell students (especially 9th-graders) this this early in the year (4 Saturdays!), but you've got quite a bit of talent.

What I would try, were I you:

1) Go for paragraph-long metaphors. Your paragraphs hold together quite well, but extended metaphor, simile, conceit, analogy will tie them tight.

2) Start cutting out some words which more obviously are you, author, turning around to be sure we, reader, are following, i.e., "I tear myself from my vinyl seat . . ." has three references to the narrator (I, myself, my) in 7 words. How about "Tearing loose from my vinyl seat"? The net result is to reduce the number of words between action-picture units. We'll still follow, but you'll get more intensity (I wouldn't suggest #2, except that you already have a good sense of individual words and I think you can handle the kind of nit-picking detail this requires.)

Now, you've got to start watching your diction more closely. Excellent word choices point up the only average: "sunburned" doesn't go with "normal."

And you need sentences that suggest—by form, syntax, syllabification, assonance and alliteration (but not too much of any)—the boredom of redundancy. You need to give us more details—what are the pointless assignments? How does she use splendid objects for pedestrian purposes?

The last two paragraphs look like exhausted writer to me. They don't have much connection w/the rest of the essay except through the title. "Ruminations" is a wonderful word, and it does tie into the tone of that marvelously funny polysyllabic sentence at bottom of p. 1. But the title attempts to explain your inclusion of what I see as subjects for more than one essay. You've got that scene in class, some generalizations (accurate) about teachers, some about yourself, and a conclusion where the angels come out blowing their trumpets for gifted programs. All important. All well written. But how are they all connected? That's why I asked on the essay about transitions.

Well, those are some reservations. But you should be proud of this work. Your writing is clever and original and invigorating. Congratulations on a very good job.

Writing Evaluations of Students

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of student writing is often regarded by writing instructors as a troublesome task. Some mentors doubt the value of a standardized instrument. What Professor John C. Sherwood (1978) writes about one such test may be applied to all who share his apprehensions:

We have here a very carefully prepared battery which doubtless would effectively rate a student's ability to recognize (though not necessarily to produce) isolated sentences (though not necessarily longer units of discourse) having the virtues of clarity and order and of being free from certain forms which for reasons often obscure are highly offensive to makers of tests. (p. 146)¹

Other writing instructors, spurning standardized tests and relying on their own judgment, encounter another apprehension—subjectivity. The poet Richard Hugo (1979) describes the source of this fear: “Every moment, I am, without wanting or trying to, telling you to write like me” (p. 3). Despite these apprehensions about the evaluation of writing, it must be done. Students deserve finally to “hear it straight,” to know in the sense applied by the Hopkins model “what works and what doesn't.” Evaluation is ultimately a teaching tool and as such it must be applied judiciously. As Maxine Hairston (1982) writes, grading is:

a teaching tool that must be used sensitively and with an awareness of consequences. If we fail to grade constructively because of guilt or

¹Reprinted from *Eighth Mental Measurements Yearbook*, O.K. Burrows (Ed.), with permission of Gryphon Press, ©1978.

sympathy or weakness, we really defraud the students. Both students and the rest of the world assume that good grades certify competence. If, by giving undeserved grades, you gloss over incompetencies for which a student will be penalized when he or she leaves your class, you have done that student a serious disservice. (p. 19)

Similarly, unwarranted downgrading is a disservice. Aside from the psychological effects on students, undeservedly low grades can deny students access to more advanced classes.

In the university courses of the Johns Hopkins Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth, evaluation is accomplished in two ways. There are of course standardized examinations. CTY's writing instructors utilize the College Board High School English Composition Achievement Test typically at the end of Writing Skills I or the middle of Writing Skills II, and the College Board Advanced Placement Test in English Language and Composition at the conclusion of Writing Skills II as a form of objective grading, which can be readily interpreted by student, parent, teacher, or school administrator. But there is a more compelling need for individually tailored final evaluations of each student's work that are written and descriptive in nature. Here grading becomes a true "teaching tool" as the students' written texts over the course of the program become the focus of instructor commentary.

Written evaluations from CTY-style writing classes contain several important items of information. They should describe specific strengths and weaknesses found in a student's compositions over the term. They also describe class participation and make recommendations for future English or writing classes in CTY-sponsored programs or in the local school and community. In so doing, these prose evaluations transmit specific information that local school administrators and instructors can compare with their own curricula when deciding where to integrate a verbally talented student who is seeking appropriate placement following a CTY-style writing skills course.

As the foregoing suggests, a written evaluation is read by many people. The evaluation not only teaches the student, but advises administrators and instructors and shares information with parents. Because the evaluation is not a private letter, it must be carefully worded. Sample evaluations follow this discussion.

CAVEATS

Avoid Harshness—Be Specific

Harshly phrased evaluations establish a context that, to an audience of administrators, instructors and parents, reads negatively. Here are some examples.

- Initially, your work was extremely disappointing.
- You are rather lazy.
- Your mechanical skills are poor.

These kinds of harsh charges demoralize students without communicating clearly to adults. What does “disappointing” mean? “Lazy” by whose standard? *All* the student’s “mechanical skills”? “Poor” in relation to what? Verbally talented students who perform poorly in a class of peers do not automatically belong in a remedial class, yet that is where harsh phrases threaten to consign them. CTY writing skills students, for instance, come from the top one percent of their age peers, and those who do not shine brightest are nevertheless in the top one percent in the country.

Be specific in your criticism, citing as much as possible students’ written evidence. The excerpts from Sample 1 (Exhibit B–1) below demonstrate an approach to two of the evaluation sentences above.

- Your first essays indicated that you had little writing experience.
- You need to continue to work on some problems with sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation, but now that you’re aware of them, there is no doubt you’ll conquer them.

This specificity establishes a recognizable context for the evaluation and allows administrators and instructors to place the student appropriately. Instead of a disappointing worker, the student is an inexperienced writer, as judged by a precourse writing sample and performance on initial class assignments. Poor mechanical skills in three specific areas can be attended to without wasting the time of student and instructor on capitalization and subject-verb agreement.

Laziness is a charge that requires the same kind of specificity and affirmative phrasing. Not “You don’t work hard enough on organizing your ideas around a topic sentence,” but “You need to work harder at making your whole paragraph relevant to its topic.” Laziness in an intellectually homogeneous class is a difficult accusation for both students and instructors to interpret, given that verbally talented students in heterogeneous classes often excel without effort. Standards for one type of class do not carry over into the other.

However, some students fail to deliver the required effort. In those cases, the issue of motivation, the cause of unsuccessful work, must be addressed. Sample 7 (Exhibit B–7) mentions specifically brevity and minimal thought as indications of lack of effort and then associates the lack of effort to an absence of motivation. The point here is not to punish students who have no interest at present in the course but who might and should continue to develop their writing skills in another environ-

ment. These highly talented students need honest criticism, but that criticism should not be delivered in such a manner that the students lose interest in continuing the writing process.

Evaluate Students Individually

Remember that writing is often a solitary labor. The evaluation must address a single writer in the second person—as a mentor writing to a disciple—for, ultimately, students are responsible for their own work. Use of the second person implies that the evaluation’s other audience, the adults surrounding and making decisions about a student’s life, is merely reading over the student’s shoulder. *To employ the third person in an evaluation is to depersonalize the student, to make the student a product that moves down the educational assembly line.* Evaluations work as a teaching tool only if they address those whom they purport to teach.

Because writing is a solitary labor, evaluations should avoid as much as possible comparing the student to “average” class performance. Claiming that someone is “the weakest writer in the class” is no disgrace if the class is composed of John Barth, Emily Bronte, Mark Twain, and Joseph Conrad. “Class average” is too relative and subjective a standard to be clearly transmitted, even to students within the class, since they do not read every composition by their classmates.

Similarly, variations in phrasing from one evaluation to another will not differentiate student success. Sample 2 (Exhibit B–2) and Sample 6 (Exhibit B–6) employ, respectively, “considerably sophisticated writing skills” and “sophisticated writing skills” to achieve little. Since neither students nor adults are likely to have the chance to compare evaluations—especially in “enrichment” or “magnet” programs where students attend separate schools—the implied class comparison will not be transmitted.

Of course, qualifiers may help place students in appropriate classes regardless of the evaluator’s intended class comparison. A student who is “very good” at mechanics may be judged worthy of skipping an entire year of grammar, whereas a student who is “competent” at mechanics may be judged to be in need of further work.

FORMAT

With the foregoing caveats in mind, the format of written evaluations can be considered. This format is simple: describe progress over the term, describe class interaction, recommend future placement and work, and be aware of the difficulties of grading.

Progress over the Term

Sample 3 (Exhibit B-3), which describes a student's progress over one year (28 Saturdays of the CTY academic year program), mentions the student's situation at the year's beginning—difficulties with paragraphing but very good mechanical skills. The first paragraph then describes dramatic improvement in essay structure, sentence syntax, and coherence, thus providing the evaluation's whole audience a clear sense of work achieved. Sample 1 (Exhibit B-1) also describes a student with initial difficulties who has made dramatic improvements.

In both samples, the evaluators mention fears and motivations of the students. This kind of feedback and encouragement is important to the evaluation's audience. It reassures the students of their abilities and also provides the adults with a sense of the students' capabilities. One student who initially reported an inability "to get my ideas across" went on to win the Silver Medal for essay writing at the Academic Decathlon, so don't underestimate the importance of this feedback.

Samples 2 (Exhibit B-2) and 5 (Exhibit B-5) represent a different and more pleasant problem—what to do with very able students. The first paragraphs of these evaluations establish the students' situations at the end of the term. Since their progress is less important and dramatic than that of other students, recommendations will be more valuable.

Class Interaction

Like any seminar, a workshop requires interaction. Here again, students need feedback describing their participation. Chastise gently those who wax loquacious and digress—most likely because they aren't listening to their classmates—and praise those who, like the student in Sample 3 (Exhibit B-3), manage to redirect the discussion.

Interaction also interests administrators and instructors, who tend to be over-worried about the "social ability" of verbally talented youth. Additionally, the evaluator can describe, as in Sample 2 (Exhibit B-2), a student's ability to abstract, summarize, or do other intellectual functions.

Recommendations

Recommendations cover two areas: material discussed in class but requiring more work, and suggestions for placement in future classes. Requirements for more work should be as specific as possible. Note Samples 1 (Exhibit B-1), 4 (Exhibit B-4), and 5 (Exhibit B-5). This exactness avoids the problems mentioned above in the caveat to avoid harshness and be specific.

Because academic offerings for verbally talented youths are of three general types—grammar/punctuation, composition, and literary analysis—recommendations for future placement should indicate both present competencies and future needs. Sample 1 (Exhibit B-1), for instance, recommends Writing Skills II, a second-level CTY class in rhetoric. Sample 2 (Exhibit B-2) recommends individual attention in a class with both critical and creative writing, a very advanced class. The other samples make similar recommendations.

Sample 3 (Exhibit B-3), however, makes a final point about individual evaluations. While harsh generalities are to be avoided, positive generalities are acceptable. The statement, “your mechanics continue to be very good,” followed by a description of composition strengths may allow the student to negotiate with the school for placement beyond an unnecessary grammatical/punctuational class. Evaluators should be aware not only of each student’s needs but of each student’s intended use of the evaluation. Thus, while a final evaluation is not the place to disagree with a student’s intention to accelerate, it *is* the place to provide a student with a strong negotiating base.

Grading

Special “enrichment” programs that draw students from a number of schools sometimes need to issue grades so that administrators and teachers can integrate a student into their curricula. This may be especially true when the student is negotiating not just for acceleration but for credit as well. When the writing instructor and the program staff have exhausted every alternative, a letter grade may be attached to the written evaluation.

Under no circumstances should a writing instructor allow a letter or number grade to go to a school without a written evaluation.

The difficulty with letter grades, as stated earlier, is that the standard does not often transmit clearly. CTY has had students with grades of C on college-level courses denied credit for a ninth-grade class. Imagine the difficulty an administrator will have with an A where the standard is a homogeneous group of verbally talented students. The best remedy for the sticky problem of grades is to find a standard with which both the writing instructor and the administrator are familiar. Ordinarily, this standard will be a freshman-level composition course at a college or university whose quality is well-known. A statement can then be integrated into the written evaluation that reads for example, “In a freshman-level composition course at Harvard, you would receive an A.”

Exhibit B-1 Sample Evaluation 1

The Johns Hopkins University
Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



It was a pleasure having you in the Writing Skills I class. Despite your fears during the first week, you proved that you learn very quickly. Your first essays indicated that you had little writing experience; by the fourth week you were producing well-structured, well-crafted compositions. You learned to use creative skills very well, strengthening your essays with vivid scenes, believable characters, even "honest" dialogue. Your imaginative writing served to communicate your good ideas.

You participated eagerly in workshops and developed your critical skills as well. Now you need to continue to work on some problems with sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation, but now that you're aware of them, there is no doubt you'll conquer them.

You will benefit from more sophisticated assignments and projects. Now that you know you're up to the challenge of such a fast-paced course I believe you're ready to work even harder. I recommend that you continue on to Writing Skills II.

Good luck!

Instructor

Exhibit B-2 Sample Evaluation 2

The Johns Hopkins University

Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



You are a gifted writer. Your first essay was a piece of beautiful writing, and your last essay--about your grandmother--was the kind of precise, careful, sensitive, detailed argumentation that scores highly in Advanced Placement tests. You have an enviable control of the language, an adroitness with phrases and with details that I have rarely seen in writers of any age. As I've said elsewhere, you have perspicacity and perspicuity, and you demonstrate both in your writing and in classroom discussions.

I think you would do best in very challenging situations where you have considerable individual attention. In most classroom situations, classmates tend to overwhelm your voice and slow you down. May I suggest that you'll be happiest in a situation which requires use of your considerably sophisticated writing skills both in critical and creative ways? You may also want to explore some of the more experimental forms of prose.

I wish I had more students like you; and I wish you good luck during the coming year.

Instructor

Exhibit B-3 Sample Evaluation 3

The Johns Hopkins University
Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



You have come a great distance during your year in Writing Skills I. Your initial paragraphing difficulties have been ameliorated; your mechanics continue to be very good. In this second semester, your work has improved dramatically; structurally and syntactically, your essays have much more coherence. Your revisions--both of your own and of others' essays--demonstrate clear logic, strong focus, and determined effort. In fact, I attribute your improvement to an impressive amount of self-motivation. You are willing to--and do--work hard and you get good results from that work.

Your comments in class have been accurate and helpful. You often cut right to the heart of a discussion, redirecting conversations which range too far afield. Writing Skills II next year will continue to require frequent writing: that might hone your skills even more.

Have a happy, healthy, and productive summer. We all look forward to seeing you back in September.

Sincerely,

Instructor

cc: Parents of student

Exhibit B-4 Sample Evaluation 4

The Johns Hopkins University

Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



Congratulations on completing a fine year in Writing Skills I. Your last essay shows great strides in your writing. Word choice, particularly verbs, is active and engaging. Sentences all matter to the essay, helping to give the reader a picture of the event. Organization is improving; when given the structure of some of these expository patterns you can write well-crafted essays. Organization within the paragraph still needs attention. Your sense of humor is one of your trademarks.

In class you were articulate and set the tone for honest criticism.

You're beginning to make some real breakthroughs. Now that you've made some significant changes in your writing, it would be a shame to let those advances go idle and wilt in the summer's sun. The pressure is off, and this can be a prime time to do some interesting writing. I would like you to keep a journal (a writer's journal, not a diary!) filled with ideas, images, scenes from your porch, wonderful words, characters you encounter, reactions to events, poems, etc. Some days it will be just a sentence; other days it will be three pages. Experiment with words and ideas. It will keep the writing flowing and be a wonderful souvenir at the end of the summer. I look forward to seeing the results this fall.

Have a happy, healthy, and productive summer. We all look forward to seeing you back in September.

Instructor

cc: Parents of student

Exhibit B-5 Sample Evaluation 5

The Johns Hopkins University
Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



Congratulations on a great year in Writing Skills I. You have a writer's ear for diction and sentence structure. As you've proved over and over again, you have the ability to make assigned topics (which can be very uninteresting) exciting and vivid. Line-by-line, your writing has grown better. Your willingness to experiment with different voices and styles has benefited you. I admire your wit, imagery, and organizational acumen.

Because the quality of your work is advanced, however, you can expect to see fewer and fewer dramatic improvements. You are now at the point where nit-picking attention to the details of technique and structure may go unnoticed by anyone but you. Do not be discouraged! Ultimately, the quality of your work has to satisfy you, and, no matter who else doesn't notice your careful work, you will. Should you choose to go into writing as a career, I predict you'll do very well for yourself. I am honored to have had you as a student.

Have a happy, healthy, busy and productive summer. We all look forward to seeing you back in September.

Instructor

cc: Parents of student

Exhibit B-6 Sample Evaluation 6

The Johns Hopkins University

Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



Your experience with forensics has helped with the rhetorical forms used in your essays. You began the session with good, tight prose and an ability to use that prose to create scenes and characters as well as to argue. You moved on to a strong command of prose techniques such as transitions and parallelism within well-organized essays. Your piece on rafting also indicates that you don't lack for subjects or the energy to explore them.

In class, you were accurate, precise, helpful, and persuasive about your points. Your classmates learned much from your analyses. I urge you to find a class which will challenge you to use your sophisticated skills in the critical analysis of literature.

Congratulations on a very good session in Writing Skills I; good luck during the coming year.

Instructor

Exhibit B-7 Sample Evaluation 7

The Johns Hopkins University
Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY)



Your work has been consistently substandard. Though you are a fairly competent writer, the brevity of your writing and the minimum of thought ("Violence in Television" had 1 good and 1 awful page, for instance) indicate a substantial lack of effort, which, after our discussions, I take to indicate lack of motivation and interest. I seriously recommend that you not return for a second semester of this course. My assumption is that your priorities lie elsewhere for the present. I don't object to that, only to your continued presence in a situation to which you have not and probably will not be willing to devote the required amount of energy and time.

Instructor

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Bibliography of Professional Essays

Some professionally written essays have been categorized below for instructors' convenience. Many of the essays fit into more than one category; in those cases, we have tried to list them in all relevant categories. Following this rhetorical organization, the essays are organized and referenced alphabetically. Instructors would do well to find an anthology that reprints these essays, but, failing such a find, permission to reprint can be had for a nominal fee by writing to the Copyright Clearance Center, 21 Congress Street, Salem, Massachusetts, 01970.

THEMATIC ARRANGEMENT

Narration

Martin Gansberg, "38 Who Saw the Murder Didn't Call the Police"
Maya Angelou, "Mama's Private Victory"
George Orwell, "A Hanging"
George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"
A.M. Rosenthal, "No News from Auschwitz"
William Golding, "Thinking as a Hobby"
John Dos Passos, "The American Plan"

Description

Rebecca West, "William Joyce"
Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"
Annie Dillard, "Transfigurations"
H.L. Mencken, "In Memoriam: W.J.B."
A.M. Rosenthal, "No News from Auschwitz"

Example

Woody Allen, "Slang Origins"
James Thurber, "Courtship Through the Ages"

Classification and Division

Donald Hall, "Four Kinds of Reading"
William Golding, "Thinking as a Hobby"
Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"
Robert Pirsig, Excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*,
pp. 73-79

Definition

Woody Allen, "Slang Origins"
Joan Didion, "The Santa Ana"
William Hazlitt, "On Familiar Style"
John McPhee, "In Suspect Terrain"
Robert Pirsig, Excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*,
pp. 260-269
Wilfred Sheed, "Why I Live Where I Live"
Mark Van Doren, "What is a Poet?"

Process Analysis

William Allen, "How to Set a World Record"
L. Rust Hills, "How to Eat an Ice Cream Cone"
Jessica Mitford, "To Dispel Fears of Live Burial"
Alexander Petrunkevitch, "The Spider and the Wasp"
Robert Pirsig, Excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*,
pp. 73-79

Essays about Writing

Richard Hugo, "Writing Off the Subject"
Robert Pirsig, Excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*,
pp. 260-269
William Hazlitt, "On Familiar Style"
Raymond Queneau, *Exercises in Style*

ALPHABETIC ARRANGEMENT

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Writing Assignments for Students

This list of essay assignments is not necessarily sequential. Ordinarily, we make assignments based on continuing reassessment of students' needs. What may not be necessary now may be useful a month from now. We generally require 3 pages handwritten or 1½ pages typewritten for each essay.

1. Describe yourself through the eyes of your opposite-sex grandparent. Include:
 - something you always say
 - one physical gesture you always make
 - one physical attribute
 - one action characteristic of you
 - one item of clothing
 - at least one important aspect of your personality
2. Describe someone other than yourself. Include the items mentioned in (1) above.
3. Create three essay titles and the first two sentences following the title for these subjects: paper, sky, sidewalk (instructors may choose to substitute other subjects).
4. Write on this subject: How Does It Feel To Be Verbally Gifted.
5. Write a process analysis.
6. Use a process analysis as a pretext to discuss some larger topic, such as a human foible (essays by L. Rust Hills and Jessica Mitford in Appendix C are good examples of this).

7. Describe and explain the importance of one major event in your life (see Chapter 2, "Throwing the Eraser").
8. Using the techniques for effective sentences discussed today, revise your classmate's essay and write a sentence summarizing the point of the essay (see Chapter 7, "Sentences," Chapter 12, "Summarizing the Essay," and Chapter 13, "Revision").
9. Revise the ending to one of your compositions (see Chapter 10, "Endings").
10. Revise the ending to one of your classmate's compositions (see Chapter 10, "Endings").
11. Write an essay with circular structure (see Chapter 10, "Endings").
12. Write an essay explaining an abstract idea with one of your own concrete experiences ("Shooting an Elephant" by George Orwell in Appendix C is a good example of this; see also Chapter 12 "Summarizing the Essay," for a short discussion of Orwell's essay).
13. Write an essay employing every cliché you can think of. The essay has to make sense, but it may be humorous.
14. Describe and solve a seemingly insoluble problem.
15. Apply William Hazlitt's criteria for familiar style to his essay, "On Familiar Style" (see Appendix C).
16. Compose two analogies (of one or two paragraphs) that explain something you understand to people who do not understand it.
17. Write an argument for or against continuing this class (this essay may also serve as an evaluation of the class).
18. Write an essay in which you begin by describing a physical object, and pursue it until that object becomes either emblematic or symbolic (see "Transfigurations" by Annie Dillard in Appendix C).
19. In Martin Gansberg's "38 Who Saw the Murder Didn't Call the Police," assume the voice of one of the neighbors in the essay and write your own version of the event. Convince us that you were justified in what you did.
20. Write a process analysis in which you "undo" the event, for example, "How to Undo the Laundry," "How to Unbuild a Fire."
21. Rewrite your own version of Woody Allen's "Slang Origins," creating your own humorous etymologies for common expressions. Or update Allen's essay with contemporary expressions and their origins.
22. Describe an incident that changed the way you look at things.
23. Write an extended apology for why you could not finish your essay.
24. Write an essay entitled "Portrait of a Young Man/Woman As Writer," tracing significant moments in your childhood that contributed to your feelings about writing. Look beyond grades received on school assignments to explain your feelings (see Chapter 1, "Molly and Ned").
25. Write a three-page sentence; no run-ons.

26. Explain how you have overcome a former prejudice (racial, religious, class, sexual).
27. Write an essay in praise of someone you admire. Avoid abstract words (wonderful, beautiful, witty, peaceful), and convince us that we would also feel this way about that person. Show, Don't Tell.

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