A PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION FOR A WRITING PROGRAM: ARTICULATING COMPOSITION AS A LIBERAL ART

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We feel daring to have created so lofty a thing as a "philosophy of composition statement" for a writing program, and more than daring to be sharing it with our colleagues at other schools and universities. However, the statement has already been published: it is one section in the handbook used by all composition teachers at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne (IPFW).* Its value lies in part in the policy it articulates, but more so in its physical nature as a paper-and-ink manifestation of principles to be shared, discussed,.and accommodated by composition teachers in a particular academic setting. Thus, we present it here in its actual form, the way it is presented to teachers. For that reason, we also present it with some trepidation, issuing the following caveats about its intentions and possible use.

First, this philosophy is intended for those who teach writing courses at IPFW. Since any philosophy is bound by its context, this statement is not suitable for another program. We offer it here only

**The IPFW Composition Handbook: A Guide to Teaching Writing in the Department of English and Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (Fort Wayne, IN: Department of English, 1984).

as a model, an example of the way one program has gone about establishing coherence and charting a course. The IPFW writing program has a unique make-up: its teachers have a unique background, its courses their own distinctive (often peculiar) history, its students particular needs. This statement explains and justifies the program to new teachers and offers a common set of principles. Several factors influence the statement: a commitment to the writing course not merely as a service course, but as a core liberal arts course with the mission of fostering intellectual development through the practice of writing; a commitment to the insights and assumptions of current rhetoric and composition theory; a sense of what the audience, current teachers as well as new teachers, needs to hear; a perception of the needs of our university, especially the needs of its students.

Following the conventions of the manifesto, we have not documented our sources. The perspicacious reader will certainly recognize the influence of people like Wayne Booth, Nancy Sommers, Linda Flower, James Kinneavy, and Janice Lauer. But by and large the philosophy of composition expressed here is ours, at least insofar as any philosophy statement can be said to be the work of individuals. We offer it to demonstrate the approach to composition taken at one major state university and to model what we believe needs doing at all curriculum levels. The philosophy statement—really a kind of political manifesto—identifies our discipline and its role in academia. If colleagues in other disciplines, parents, academic and social administrators, and legislators are ever to respect what we ourselves respect, we must explain and justify ourselves. The statement is one such attempt.

THE IPFW COMPOSITION INSTRUCTOR'S HANDBOOK

Introduction

This portion of the handbook expresses the philosophy of composition underlying writing courses taught through the Department of English and Linguistics at IPFW and provides guidelines for implementing this philosophy.

A shared philosophy assures greater coherence and consistency in a writing program, and thus more effective instruction and better prepared students. At the same time, it aims to achieve this without

diminishing the individual teacher's role in establishing classroom policy and developing assignments, in applying methods and tactics, and in emphasizing material according to particular teaching strengths. It seeks to guide composition instruction, not dictate specific classroom practice. In short, it presents shared standards for writing instruction without standardizing teaching. The objective is establishing a coordinated program in which teachers share goals and general strategies. The aim is *not* mutually assured mediocrity.

Primary Objective of Freshman Writing Courses

The goal of introductory writing courses is to prepare students to respond successfully in writing situations, whether academic, professional, or personal. Such courses should present a core of rhetorical principles which students can apply to writing a philosophy or literature paper, a biology lab report, a resume, a newspaper editorial or letter to the editor, a theological treatise, a business letter, a grocery list, a greeting card, a poem or short story, a technical report, a scholarly article, even graffiti. The course must be more than merely a skills or service course. It should help students improve the reading, thinking, and reasoning powers that they will need in all writing situations. It should be taught as a liberal arts course with the ultimate aim of enabling students to produce thoughtful and articulate writing appropriate to its occasion. These objectives are explained for students in a course goals statement which is distributed and discussed on the first day of classes (see Appendix I).

Rhetorical Awareness and Context

Writing instruction obviously aims to produce effective writers. Effective writing can be described in many ways, but perhaps its most general characteristic is "rhetorical awareness." The effective writer, in other words, has developed rhetorical awareness.

When writing programs define goals, they often include the ability to organize, to defend a thesis, to edit, to combine sentences, to write correct prose, to do research, and so on. But all of these competencies are sub-skills of rhetorical awareness, which also demands other, less-often-recognized skills. A writer who is rhetorically aware knows why he or she is writing, has a sense of purpose and audience, understands the nature of the "occasion" and the conventions that may govern it, understands his or her ethical position relative to the audience, knows the inventional or

logical methodologies that audiences may apply to subjects, and makes intelligent decisions about style and arrangement based on this rhetorical awareness.

These concerns, treated in classical and contemporary rhetorical theory, are defined in terms of rhetorical context, the key elements of which are audience and purpose (see Figure 1). Context is the notion from which all other compositional principles, values, and practices follow, as "occasion" was the determining discourse characteristic in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. "Effective writing" fits its context, is sensitive to the interests, knowledge, and values of its audience, and has a social purpose. Effective writing benefits readers by informing, entertaining, or persuading them.

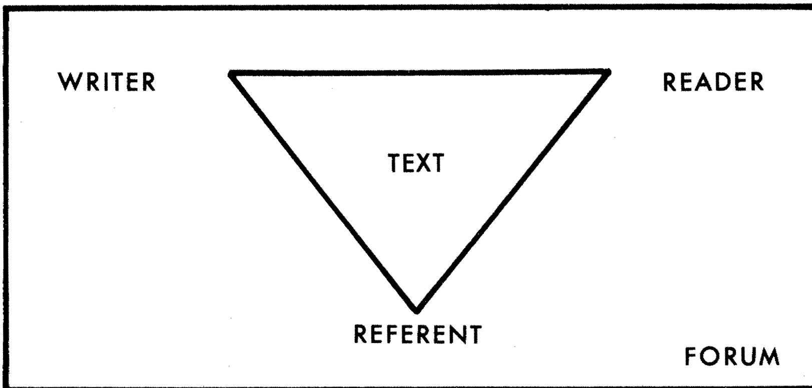

Figure 1: ELEMENTS OF RHETORICAL CONTEXT

Compositional practices and principles should be explained in terms of rhetorical context, in terms of audience and purpose. Is the phrase "bi-polar development chip" unnecessary jargon or not? In some contexts yes, in others no. Is the phrase going to appear in a technical report for a computer scientist or in a *Time* magazine article? Is it a phrase just invented, or is it a well-established descriptor in the company the writer works for? Is a certain argument valid or not? That depends on whether its underlying assumption is accepted as given by the audience and on whether its proof meets the audience's norms for validity. In some situations, one example will do; in others, the writer needs many. Questions about every facet of writing appeal to context.

Students should practice writing in a variety of rhetorical con-

texts. They should write about a variety of subjects and for a variety of audiences—not only for the writing teacher, but also for other academic and non-academic audiences: their peers, teachers in other disciplines, readers of local newspapers or national trade journals, special interest groups, supervisors and managers, and so on. Students likewise need to write for different purposes: to inform, to persuade, to argue, to entertain, to express themselves. Varying subject, audience, and purpose from assignment to assignment will show students how and why mode, style, and format decisions rely on rhetorical context and will help them develop the kind of "rhetorical judgment" they need to write successfully. Accordingly, students need to learn strategies for identifying and analyzing their audience's values and assumptions, for exploring their subjects fully, for determining the relationship between themselves, their audience, and their subject, and for understanding the expectations of the forum they are entering.

A rhetorical context is partly defined by generic and disciplinary constraints, of which student writers need to be aware. Examples of such constraints might include the unspoken criteria determining "valid" evidence in a sociology research article, the appropriateness of appeals in a local church bulletin, and the sense of acceptable style operative in a literary journal. Students need to recognize that different audiences scrutinize different objects, apply different "rules of evidence" (perhaps unconsciously), interpret differently, hold different senses of appropriateness, and subscribe to different conventions for formating and documenting sources. Audience analysis—analysis of the individuals making up the audience as well as the collective assumptions of the group—thus plays an important part in writing.

Students tend to identify audiences vaguely at best: "the general public" and "my classmates" are two favorites. They need instead to pinpoint realistic audiences and to articulate those audiences' assumptions. If they are writing a feature article for the campus newspaper on the job market for graduating seniors, they will fail if they probe no deeper than "students" as audience. They should learn to pose for themselves questions which focus on the nature of the potential audience: Who will have an interest in the subject? (The answer might well include teachers and administrators as well as students nearing graduation or looking for employment.) What will those audiences want to learn? What will their biases and emotional postures be? The authors may, depending on their level and

the scope of the assignment, need to be aware of more immediate audiences (the editor) and more remote audiences (someone reviewing their portfolio for graduate-school admission). The point here is that students must feel they are writing to effect change in some social context; they must not feel they are merely producing a product to be graded by the teacher.

Dealing with rhetorical context means understanding how a subject should be treated in order to best accomplish the writer's aim for the given audience; it means recognizing the best audience for a given subject (and perhaps changing aim or audience—if possible—in a revision); it means knowing how to tailor a discourse to fit the writer's intent and the audience's expectations.

Creating a contextual writing assignment confronts teachers with a difficult task. Sometimes it is useful to present students with a ready-made rhetorical context; much of their professional writing is likely to be on assigned topics: "Write a report on the application of computerized numerical-control machines in our production process." Often, good writing assignments arise from the students' own needs; helping them learn to identify their own reasons to write and their own goals in writing may occupy a significant portion of the course. Explaining aim and asking students to fashion a full context, to provide audience and subject, works well. Giving them a general subject ("a public issue which affects you personally") and asking them to develop a specific topic also works. Students should be allowed—and encouraged—to write on some subjects they know well and also to write on new subjects: they are likely to face both experiences in the future.

Obviously rhetorical contexts are not always clearcut or given in the world outside the classroom. Indeed, they are not fixed entities but develop through the writing process. In some cases, audience and subject are at first ill-defined and even aim is unclear. Students may encounter a situation in which, ironically, the best way to persuade an audience is to provide information or, conversely, the best way to inform is to provide satire. Students need to match their purpose with the discourse they are producing and the audience they are addressing, to ask the question "What effect is this discourse likely to have on my reader?" and "What do I want it to accomplish?" They need to identify a possible forum to provide models for the pieces they write: "Where might this piece of writing be published?"

Even a rhetorical context set by the teacher is vague early in the writing process; it takes a certain amount of writing around the point to formulate a precise context. Writers often have to discover *what* they have to say before they determine to whom they should say it: writing is an act of discovery, not merely the presentation of pre-conceived ideas. In at least one assignment, students might be allowed to create their own aim, audience, and subject, perhaps to write for their own reasons, whatever they may be.

The Writing Process

Writing is a complex process that often defies description or modeling. Nevertheless, models are necessary vehicles for understanding. If our students are to succeed as writers—and we as writing teachers—we need a model that explains the process without oversimplifying or misrepresenting it. Below is a two-faceted model which looks at the writing process both chronologically (diachronically) and non-chronologically (synchronically) (see Figure 2). Actually, what is called *the* writing process involves two distinct though intersecting processes: Writing proceeds from beginning to end through time, but also exercises various faculties simultaneously. That is, the text as product typically evolves diachronically. Diachronically, the writer begins by recognizing or developing a motive for writing (an "initial exigency"), proceeds through some planning phase, moves through drafting, and arrives finally at a completed product. However, the various cognitive operations of the writer intersect with the evolving text, and so, synchronically the writer engages a number of intellectual operations continuously and simultaneously throughout the process, though not always with equal emphasis: the writer invents, arranges and creates style; the writer develops a sense of voice (persona) and audience.

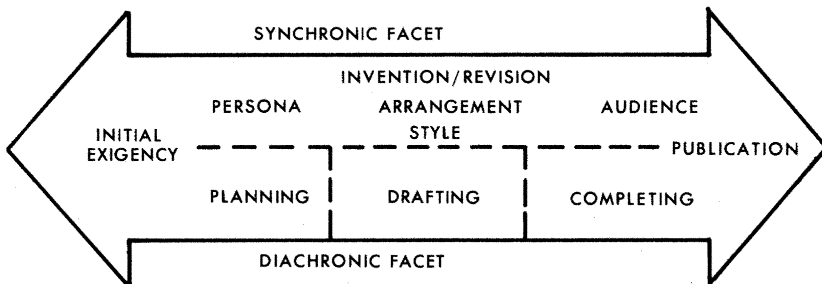

Figure 2: A TWO-FACETED WRITING PROCESS MODEL

Both processes can be seen as the continuous revision of the first motivation to write, the initial perception of dissonance. The writing teacher should help students understand the synchronic and diachronic facets of writing by discussing them and by providing strategies to help students apply their intellects at various stages in the process. The teacher should certainly intervene in the process to help guide students toward successful completion of each project. Early intervention may take the form of discussing the assignment, helping students create a realistic (if not real) context—for example identifying a concrete forum such as the "Personal Experience" section of *Sports Illustrated* or a letter to the editor of the *New York Review of Books*—or helping them apply a heuristic. Later intervention might take the form of commenting on drafts or having students analyze their own work.

The Diachronic View: Planning, Drafting, Completing

Teaching writing as process often requires that teachers adjust their views of what a writing course should be. In the traditional writing course calling for a paper a week (with perhaps several weeks for a term paper at the end of the semester), the student produces, say, ten products, and the teacher pronounces ten separate judgments. This approach surely limits the teacher's potential usefulness to the student—and forces the teacher into the unnecessarily burdensome task of reading hundreds of separate assignments. A more productive role for the instructor is that of advisor, helping the student learn to make decisions during the composing process.

Instead of assigning a paper a week, then, the instructor might require five or six projects over an entire semester. Each project consists of several distinct assignments: perhaps a prewriting, a proposal, a working bibliography, a draft, and a "final" copy (the most polished work the student can produce). This procedure yields numerous grades, which can be weighted to favor the final product yet still encourage students to develop both inventing and drafting skills. It allows the instructor to advise students about how they might improve papers before it is too late for them to incorporate the advice into the work at hand. This procedure also discourages plagiarism and makes more efficient use of the instructor's time.

Another advantage of teacher intervention at various stages of the composing process is the additional emphasis placed on content. Looking at a writing project in its formative stages allows the

instructor to work directly on developing the student's ability to think. This emphasis on content early in a writing project is vital to teaching writing as a liberal art. We believe that by working on *what* a student has to say as we work on *how* it is said, and by taking the substance of that message very seriously indeed, we will make it easier for the student to master the principles of organization and the conventions of usage. We must not neglect content by focusing merely on arrangement and style; conversely, we must not neglect the quality of organization and expression by commenting only on ideas.

Students in introductory writing courses should be introduced, then, to strategies for planning, drafting, and completing discourse. They need much guidance in *the planning phase* especially: they need to learn how to develop a rhetorical context and how to work within one assigned, how to overcome problems associated with writer's block and writing anxiety, how to analyze an audience, and how to articulate a planning strategy. Later, students should be encouraged to revise papers, and teachers should help students through *the drafting phase* by looking at drafts and commenting on them. For assignments early in the semester, the teacher may want to look at first (or early) drafts, and for later assignments to look at second or third drafts. Early drafts could be submitted in the usually unkempt condition of the real draft; a later "polished" draft might be the student's third or fourth draft in typed form. In *the completing phase*, students apply editing and proofreading skills to make their texts more concise, more fluent, more readable; they polish their texts, readying them for final production and publication.

The Synchronic View: Invention, Arrangement, Style

The synchronic view traditionally dominated composition pedagogies. Today, the reverse trend may lead us to overemphasize the diachronic view. Both views are necessary to understand the writing process. Invention, arrangement, and style are vital concerns throughout the writing process, a process which inevitably extends over some period of time and evolves a text in various states.

Invention. Invention is often associated with the early phases of the writing process; we can more usefully think of it as discovery and idea generation that occurs throughout the writing process. We should not give students the idea that they invent their content for a paper in the planning phase, and then stop inventing once they enter the drafting phase. Invention may not produce a key con-

cept until many weary drafts have proven lifeless. Similarly, revision (another perspective on invention) involves "re-seeing" one's writing throughout the process; it, too, is often associated with one diachronic phase of the writing process—the completion phase. But it is more useful to present students with the idea that one invents and revises continuously throughout a writing project, that the writer does not consciously try to shut down the "inventive faculty" at a certain phase. Of course, when time's winged chariot draws near, one must be able to complete a project; some students will have to learn to accept closure, but more will have to learn to remain open to change throughout the process.

Students must be taught to invent, not merely told to invent. Invention strategies recommended include freewriting, brainstorming, cubing, looping, tagmemic heuristics, modes, journalistic questions, and *topoi*. Generally these strategies fall into two types: non-guided (aleatory) strategies and guided (heuristic) strategies. The aleatory inventive techniques, such as freewriting, journal keeping, and brainstorming, do not provide students with categories but encourage free expression. In a freewriting, for instance, students write in a continuous burst of discourse. Such a technique can uncover latent thoughts and help counter writer's block. A heuristic strategy such as the *topoi*, Burke's pentad, the tagmemic heuristic, or the traditional modes, provides students with categories which they apply to a topic in order to discover and organize what they already know about the topic. Students might be instructed, for instance, to describe an issue, then to explain how it has changed through time, then classify it, evaluate it, and so on. Such a strategy helps students shift mental gears and can stimulate thought. It can be especially useful for helping students overcome their most difficult writing obstacle—the blank page.

Invention strategies are sometimes introduced only in the planning phase of the writing process, but this approach, again, may send students the wrong signals. It might be useful to have students do a freewriting, for instance, at a late drafting stage, or to apply a heuristic at a late stage, to "catch" ideas they may have missed. Audience analysis both early and late in the writing process is useful. We suggest acquainting students with several inventive techniques, helping them become proficient at at least one aleatory and one heuristic strategy, and encouraging them to manipulate these techniques to suit their personal styles, their particular goals, and their rhetorical context.

Invention aims to develop the cognitive skills essential to successful writing. Skills frequently identified as cognitive include the ability to list, to narrate, to describe, to generalize from particulars, to analyze, to categorize and classify, to compare and contrast, and to analogize. These skills may be thought of as basic, serving a set of more complicated intellectual operations such as evaluating and interpreting. (Note the resemblance of these skills to the traditional modes. Invention as a strategy can be seen here to involve skills usually treated as elements of arrangement.)

Research, often confused as a type, aim, or mode of writing, should be treated as a component of invention. Too often students equate the notion of "research" with "term paper." "Research" to them means footnotes and bibliography, a mandatory ten to fifteen pages of tedious and purposeless writing about broad subjects. More accurately, "research" refers to a method of inquiry useful for any kind of writing assignment. Clearly we want our students to see reearch as the process of consulting sources and collecting information for a writing project. Students should learn the value of research and how to incorporate into their own texts the information they gather. They must be able to read and represent accurately the writing of others, and they must know how to paraphrase and summarize before they can effectively incorporate information from the speech or writing of others into their own texts. Yet this does not mean that a traditional "term paper" must be taught; students should come to understand research as a broader activity than simply looking through books and journals in the library. Their research should be primary as well as secondary. They should be encouraged to generate original data through observation, participation, and experimentation.

Arrangement. Ordering ideas is not only a great convenience to the reader, it is a powerful heuristic which helps writers arrive at insights, reach conclusions, and see the ramifications of their theses. The process approach demands that arrangement be treated as organic, growing out of rhetorical context. Rather than assigning descriptive papers or comparison-contrast papers, the teacher sets rhetorical context and helps the student apply the organizational principles which will best support a strategy and convey a sense of form. For example, an assignment might ask students to "create a persuasive advertisement selling some object (of their choice) to their classmates." After fashioning rhetorical context, a student might choose a strategy based on description, comparison-contrast, or any

of several other patterns. Whatever the pattern chosen, a teacher might first discuss its fundamental appropriateness to the strategy, then the way in which the pattern is being worked out, and then the extent to which form is satisfyingly apparent. The point is that students should be taught how to select and adapt a pattern appropriate to purpose and audience, not given a pattern and told to practice it on a topic of their choice.

Students should of course be introduced to the modes as conventional organizing strategies. If the modes (e.g., description, narration, classification, analogy, evaluation, definition) are also used as heuristics, then a student's prewriting exercise could naturally lead to an informal outline based on one mode or the other, or on a combination of modes. Given a rhetorical context, students should be taught to experiment with different organizational strategies—and cautioned against doing what comes most naturally for them, that is, seizing as "final" the first organizational strategy that comes to mind.

Outlining is a useful heuristic for discovering an adequate form, as long as it is regarded as an intermediate stage of the writing process, not as its beginning. When the outline is taught as a product—when it becomes an end rather than a means toward an end—its usefulness can be impaired. Formating is another important component of arrangement. Students benefit from learning how the physical shape of a discourse can be manipulated to assist the reader. A business letter, short report, or memo assignment conveniently introduces the concept of format; placing headings in a lengthy paper reflects a format decision; including visual aids, appendixes, and glossaries depends on a decision about how a paper's aim can best be accomplished. Students should understand that not all writing is done in essay form and that very often rhetorical context requires a discipline-specific format for delivering information to the reader.

Style. The third element of the synchronic process, style, is probably also the slipperiest. In one sense, the sense in which "the style is the person," the writer's whole approach to subject and method of inquiry reflects style. In another sense, style refers to general tone and to syntax and diction. In its most mundane sense, style refers to a standard pattern of conventional usage, punctuation, mechanics.

All of these sense of "style" are valid, and we can ignore none of them. Generally, our students need to develop an effective personal style, one which will enable them to achieve their rhetorical

ends in a variety of contexts. Often they need to overcome Engfish, Macrorie's term for the self-conscious, inflated, institutional parody of correctness. Particularly, then, they should first start to develop an individual message, and then try to frame that message in language that is their own. If they are to create the language themselves, they must be able to manipulate syntax and diction to establish mood, tone, and emphasis, to attain clarity and precision, all qualities which must be judged relative to rhetorical context. Sentence combining exercises and editing exercises are useful for developing students' syntactical maturity (fluency).

Students must also be taught to handle the stylistic evidence of research, i.e., how to incorporate garnered information into a text, how to attribute it to its sources, how to document borrowed material. They should come to understand that footnoting is only one stylistic approach to documentation. Attribution should be handled in different ways for different contexts. News articles, for instance, acknowledge sources without using footnotes. Somewhere along the line, all students should have to write at least one paper which uses a formal academic system of documentation, though that paper need not be heavily weighted, and it should not be the last paper of the semester. Students should learn to locate information, as well as to adapt it to different rhetorical contexts; they should be able to use different style sheets (e.g., the revised MLA, APA).

Of course we want to teach students to use the conventions of standard written English fluently, and just as certainly students will not take these conventions seriously if they are not insisted upon. Usage, punctuation, and mechanics are best taught during the intermediate or final stages of a writing project. Treating such concerns too early can effectively block invention. The time to weigh out a grade influenced by the student's adherence to conventions is during evaluation of the final copy. Certainly we must explain the conventions and provide manageable examples; such examples will work better if they are handled in a context, and best when they are drawn from the students' own work. Editing and proofreading workshops are useful for drawing students' attention to conventions.

Areas Often Overemphasized

The introductory composition course must address a variety of principles without overemphasizing any single concern. When a sub-skill like editing becomes the teacher's sole or primary focus,

students may confuse mastery of the sub-skill with mastery of writing. Such confusion is potentially harmful: perhaps all teachers have known students who believed they were good writers simply because they avoided surface errors, as well as students who believed that correctness was unimportant because they had insight. Some principles commonly overemphasized and some methods commonly abused in composition classes are discussed below.

Usage, Spelling, and Punctuation. Obviously, students must learn to write conventionally acceptable prose and to edit and proofread their work carefully. They must understand that, fair or not, some readers will judge their writing competence, even their intelligence, solely or primarily on whether they spell all their words correctly and put their commas in the right places. While such skills are thus important, it is counterproductive to make them the primary concern in the composition classroom. We cannot, in one or two sentences, solve all the problems of basic writers. Helping them work on rhetorical context, development, and invention may be the best way to help them gain control of syntax and conventions; encouraging frequent revision helps, too. Rote drilling or memorization of parts of speech or rules will not help: research indicates that grammar instruction does not improve students' overall writing ability (in fact, it can make their writing worse). Explaining conventions while students are working on their own prose, while they are working within a specific rhetorical context, works better, especially when they see that they have a chance to make the improvements before their work is graded. Also, tolerating a certain amount of "error" can encourage learning: students who are working to acquire a more complex syntax are likely to make mistakes in punctuation; they should not be punished for doing so.

Anthologies and Handbooks. Anthologies can provide students with writing models and focus discussion of rhetorical principles. Problems result, however, when professional models, rather than the students' own writing, become the focus of instruction. The matter is one of emphasis. Class time should be spent working directly on rhetorical principles and their application to the students' writing. Spending disporportionate time on the essays of James Thurber, E. B. White, or Joan Didion may work wonders for the students' appreciation of culture, but promises to do little for their own writing. One should be wary of using too many essays that are literary in the Arnoldian tradition; such essays are inappropriate as models for our students since they have usually become un-

moored from their original contexts. Because the historical context of such essays is often not clear, they can, if used as models, work against rhetoric's primary goal. Professional essays can be more useful as *subjects* for student writing, but using them as subjects exclusively forces students to write only about things they may not care or choose to write about—worse, they may see little purpose in such assignments.

Handbooks can be useful at the editing stage, but are generally unsatisfactory as rhetorics, that is, as explanations of rhetorical principles. Learning to write involves developing sound judgment; too often handbooks substitute rules and formulas for judgment. We recommend limited use of the handbook in class. Extensive grammar, spelling, and punctuation drill from the handbook will not make a lasting contribution to students' writing ability. Students may learn how to do exercises through repetition, but it is unlikely that they will transfer this specialized knowledge to their general writing skill. Instead, students might be taught how to use the handbook as a reference tool at the editing stage (how to look things up in the glossary of usage, for instance) and should be advised to ignore it most of the time.

Paragraph Construction and Structural Devices. Learnng about the formal features of discourse and about paragraph construction can sometimes help students better understand what they are writing. However, such skills cannot be taught in isolation, especially at introductory levels. Students need to see that such textual features as topic sentences, subordination, and coordination must be used to serve the needs of a larger rhetorical context. The static abstractions (unity, coherence, emphasis) and the various structural techniques (subordination, coordination, transition) are best taught within the constraints of a rhetorical context, and as subordinate to these constraints: what receives emphasis in a sentence is as much a matter of what the reader sees as important as it is a matter of word order. Students should be made aware of various structural devices but they must also appreciate that a writer settles on a device or organizational pattern only after arriving at a fairly clear sense of aim. We may needlessly mislead students by telling them to order a paragraph by beginning with the topic sentence, for example, rather than presenting them with a situation which first leads them to develop their purpose and then requires them to decide on appropriate patterns and devices for achieving their aim.

Formal Logic. Instruction in formal logic has never been

demonstrably connected to effective writing. Teaching students a little about induction and deduction and about syllogisms may help them understand the nature of argument or the rules of evidence, and thus be useful in teaching persuasive or critical writing, but instruction in logic should serve, not replace, writing assignments. Teaching students strategies for arguing and persuading (especially helping them appreciate the ethical responsibilities inherent in such context) is of course a worthy goal—but again such strategies are best taught in context.

Short-Answer Quizzes. Ascertaining whether students have absorbed principles, and perhaps rewarding in some degree those who have, even if they have not been able to introduce those principles very effectively into their writing, is a legitimate goal. However, it is hard to imagine a use for multiple-choice, true-false, or fill-in-the-blank quizzes in writing classes. Teaching students how to use their writing skills to respond effectively on essay exams is a sound practice which may be made to serve a testing purpose, but simply giving essay or short-answer exams is not the same thing as teaching students how to write them.

Literature. Using literary works as subjects for writing is a long-standing tradition in English departments. Literary works provide rich and complex material—an engaging subject matter with which the teacher is usually well acquainted. It is possible to offer a writing course, built on sound rhetorical principles, which uses some literary works as subject matter. But danger lurks. Because students are supposed to learn to write about a variety of subjects, it is easy to overuse literature. Less obviously, instructors may easily develop unreasonable expectations; writing teachers are often literary specialists, and students may be virtually without instruction in literary analysis. Too, the rhetorical context of an assignment based on literature is somewhat constricting: the instructor, a hypothetical English literature scholar, professional literary journals. This said, using literature in the composition classroom is by no means anathema, but it must be introduced with great care and in limited quantities; the course must stress writing and rhetorical principles, not literary analysis.

Writing Assignments

Every semester-length writing course should offer five or six out-of-class projects—done by the students in stages—and three in-

class writing assignments (which may be part of a larger project but which should be graded). At least one project should be literary or expressive, one persuasive, one argumentative, and one informative. Though no generally agreed upon discourse schema satisfactorily classifies all non-literary writing, we feel that some generic distinctions are useful for students, enabling them to make distinctions between writing types.

Literary and Expressive Writing. This sort of work is often mistitled "creative" but that highly charged word leads most students into the thoughtless misconception that, because its inventive sources may be somewhat different, other work is uncreative. In fact, literary and expressive writing are excellent vehicles for explaining such stylistic characteristics as connotation and prose rhythm, and offer students the opportunity to develop a sense of voice and persona and to employ various strategies and tropes which are useful in any kind of writing. Students should write at least one literary or expressive piece—and preferably both. In expressive writing, students examine closely their personal experience and share its lessons with an appropriate audience. In literary writing (recommended types are poems, short stories, satires), students learn to fashion fictional contexts and to work within certain generic constraints. Both types exercise facets of the students' intellect and style that may not otherwise be tapped. We need to recognize that writing involves nonrational and intuitive as well as rational faculties.

Persuasive Writing. Students should become acquainted with the various appeals writers use to move readers to action: the logical, emotional, ethical, and stylistic appeals. In at least one written assignment, students should aim to persuade: that is, to write from an advocate's position. Editorials, advertisements, position papers, and sales letters are possible forms. The assignments may require more or less research, and documentation should suit the rhetorical context.

Informative Writing. Students should write at least one informative paper, aimed, obviously, at an audience that needs information about a particular subject; such an assignment could be a simple set of instructions or directions, a news or feature piece for a newspaper, a summary or abstract, even an encyclopedia article.

Argumentative Writing. Students should write at least one argumentative paper in which they advance a thesis for an audience interested in examining a subject critically. Argumentative writing

differs from persuasive writing in its effort to involve the reader in the reasoning process. A final exam assignment, written for the teacher, which asks the students to evaluate the text used in class would be such an exercise, since the teacher is a reader already well acquainted with the subject. students might write a critical paper focusing on an issue or problem in their academic discipline or on social, political, or ethical issues. A technical report, an analysis of a poem, or a review of a book, TV show, or movie could be argumentative. The extent and nature of the research required and the kind of documentation called for will vary with context.

In-Class Writing. Students must learn to write acceptably under pressure and in a limited time. Learning to write a complete and reasonably coherent discourse in a single sitting is valuable. We should see how students write without the opportunity for revision, and allow that ability some weight in the final grade. Asking students to write in-class progress reports, summaries, or evaluations also minimizes the possibility of plagiarism.

Evaluating Student Writing

Prewriting, drafts, and revisions are of course evaluated differently. Teachers should comment on prewriting, and may choose to grade it, perhaps on a simple plus/minus scale. Comments on prewriting should be directed toward helping the student focus thought, clarify ideas, expand explanations, reconceptualize topics, and, sometimes, start over. The prewriting assignment is the teacher's opportunity to direct the student's thinking early in the writing process; skillful questioning can provoke the student into deeper reflection on a topic. Students should eventually learn to do this critical questioning on their own, but to do so they will need the writing teacher's guidance.

Commentary on drafts should help the student improve the developing paper. The teacher should avoid "correcting" a draft for the student, but should instead ask questions that encourage the student to consider new strategies. The student is responsible for revision, not the teacher. Overcommenting at the draft stage may be counterproductive: voluminous commentary simply wastes the composition instructor's time because in most cases it only frustrates the student's efforts. If students display problems in rhetorical context or development, teachers should probably limit comments to these concerns. If a student's draft shows a grasp of

overall rhetorical matters, then perhaps comments on readability will be helpful at the drafting stage; this is more likely later in the semester than early on, and with better rather than weaker students. Students must learn that revision means more than merely correcting all the words that the teacher has circled, more than simple editing or proofreading: revision means rethinking one's approach to a rhetorical context and, if necessary, making major changes in strategy, audience, organization, and development. The teacher, by focusing commentary on these major concerns at the draft stage, can lead the student to genuine revision. Overemphasis on conventional correctness in drafts will defeat the purpose of revision.

When evaluating a completed project, or when grading the student's final revision, the teacher should be guided first and foremost by the general principle of rhetorical awareness. How successfully does the writing accomplish its aim for its intended reader? Has the writer understood the requirements of the rhetorical context and responded to them adequately? Extending from this general criterion are other more specific evaluative criteria:

The writing process: the ability to invent, plan, prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and proofread effectively;
Focus: the ability to generate a meaningful focus (or thesis, in argumentative writing) and maintain it through an entire discourse;
Content: the ability to generate content by inventing and conducting research, in the broadest sense of the term: exploring one's own memory and examining one's own critical posture, observing, interviewing, reading, surveying, consulting a full range of available primary and secondary sources;
Development: the ability to demonstrate a thesis, to describe a scene, to exemplify a point, to create an appeal—in short, to apply a variety of devices (e.g., metaphor, ethical appeal, testimony) as appropriate;
Organization: the ability to employ the modes to arrange an entire discourse, to use paragraphing effectively, to achieve coherence, to use formating techniques as desirable;
Audience: the ability to assess the readers' needs and to develop appropriate strategies for fulfilling those needs;
Style: the ability to write clearly and concisely, forcefully and fluently, and the ability to control diction and syntax to achieve

the level of readability and the degree of emphasis appropriate to context;

Conventions: the ability to generate prose that adheres to conventional standards, to edit and proofread thoroughly, to use particular disciplinary conventions as appropriate.

Teachers may choose to use these criteria as an evaluative schema, or to develop their own. Different assignments may in fact call for different emphasis, and thus different schema. We recommend holistic grading practices, i.e., a paper gets one grade for overall effectiveness (certainly not, for instance, separate grades for "content" and "form"). Teachers should make their grading standards clear to students and should also make clear that evaluation is influenced by factors aside from features of the written product: the time of the semester, previous comments on papers, the teacher's sense of the student's particular needs and development. Despite this, grading writing is not, as some students mistakenly think, merely a matter of opinion: grading is the thoughtful exercise of the instructor's sound and developed judgment.

Conclusion

Writing is an immensely complex process. Many of our students are marginally prepared to begin work on the college level. Many more have a negative or even hostile attitude toward writing. Every writing course, no matter how modestly described, presents us with a tremendous goal, every semester a seemingly impossible task: How can we possibly teach our students what they need to know about writing, and improve their perspective toward writing, in the meager time allotted?

One approach to this problem—encouraged by too many composition texts, school administrators, and state legislators—has been to limit goals by focusing on a few select skills: to focus extensively on matters of correctness and usage, to cover only one type of writing, even to use formulas. Students can indeed master isolated sub-skills in a limited time. We can teach our students the five-paragraph formula, make them memorize the "seven easy steps to success as a writer," and cure them of the comma splice, all in one semester, if that is all we concern ourselves with. Likewise, if we assign the same type of essay over and over again, the students may learn to master that type. Perhaps we will have eased our con-

sciences, too, given ourselves a sense of achievement: "Well, at least they know how to do *that*!"

We should be wary of such "achievements." Mastery of a few sub-skills is not likely to make any lasting contribution to our students' rhetorical competence. What they need is a holistic understanding of the writing process, of what it means to take up a pen (or word processor) and enter a rhetorical context. They need to understand principles which they can bring to bear in genuinely original ways, not to memorize a set of rules or formulas that will drive them into stereotypical responses. They need strong cognitive skills: critical reading ability, reasoning powers, inventive capabilities. In other words, writing is a liberal art, even if it is also a sullen craft.

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Appendix I
Writing Course Goals
Department of English and Linguistics

The primary goal of this writing course is to prepare you for future writing experiences—academic, professional, and personal. This course will provide you with a set of rhetorical principles and strategies useful for writing a philosophy or literature paper, a biology lab report, or resume, a newspaper editorial or letter to the editor, a business letter, a theological treatise or sociology research article, a grocery list, a greeting card, a poem, a technical report, even an obscene graffito in the lavatory. In short, the principles apply to *all* writing situations.

To help you accomplish this goal, your teacher will assign five or six writing projects during the semester. Each project will involve a distinct rhetorical situation. That is, you will be writing for different audiences (e.g., teachers in various disciplines, public readers, bosses, peers); for various purposes (to inform, to persuade, to argue, to entertain); and in a variety of modes, styles, and formats. In addition, your teacher will employ other exercises, including in-class assignments, to help you develop the rhetorical skills necessary to complete each project successfully.

You will also learn something about the nature of the writing process. Each of your projects will have at least three stages. In the planning and prewriting stages you will generate ideas for writing and will determine why you are writing and to whom. In the drafting stage, you will assemble your ideas into readable form and attend to such matters as development, organization, and style. In revising, you will make whatever changes and adjustments are necessary to produce the best possible product (and, of course, editing and proofreading skills are important). The teacher (and perhaps your classmates) will assist you as you move through these stages. Your teacher will evaluate your writing primarily on the basis of rhetorical effectiveness: how successfully does the writing accomplish its aim for its intended reader?

Reading and thinking skills will also be developed. Do not think of "reading" and "thinking" as separate from writing. "Thinking" is not something you do before you write; it is part of your writing. Your ability to read critically is essential to generating content, to understanding your audience, and to revising effectively.

Writing is a means of communication, a way for you to make your ideas known (and to discover them in the first place), a way to defend yourself if need be, a way to solve problems, even a way to recreate (as well as to re-create). In short, writing can be a way for you to make your life better. We regard it as a basic and essential human activity. Whatever your major, whatever your career aspirations, whatever your interests, writing will be important to you. Regard this course as an opportunity to develop communications skills and as a vital stage in your growth as a writer.