A Survey of Theme and Creative Writing in Secondary Schools

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A SURVEY OF THEME AND CREATIVE WRITING
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

This survey of theme and creative writing in secondary schools was written to aid composition teachers. It consists of a compilation of errors made most often by high school students and offers methods to remedy the errors. Seven errors found to occur most frequently were incomplete and run-on sentences, wrong use of tense, misuse of punctuation, incorrect spelling, non-adherence to main ideas, omission of needed words, and errors in proper use of case. Each is considered separately and suggestions given to overcome these difficulties.

Methods to improve writing done by secondary students are presented. Each plan attacks the problem from a different point of view and the teacher may decide which is best for the particular group. All methods presented have proved successful. Plans are designated as follows: Kentucky Council Plan; University of Kansas Plan; Urbana, Illinois Plan; Silvy Kraus Plan; Groucher College Conference; Pittsburgh Public Schools; New England Association; Cranbrook Plan; "Natural" Method; Evans Plan; Ells High School Plan; Sequential Plan; Grand Rapids Plan; and the New Haven Method.
The areas which have received special emphasis are those which involve the abilities of the students, training for keener observation, use of outlines, effects of literature and reading, practical forms of writing, precis writing, themes, research papers, slow and accelerated groups of students and teacher evaluation.
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PREFACE

The need for a unified survey of methods to teach composition in secondary schools prompted this survey. In this compilation I have selected varied methods to facilitate teaching in this area. I chose methods which I felt were most adaptable to the majority of classroom situations and which did not involve expensive equipment. All methods presented have proved successful in the environments in which they have been tried. However, all the plans will not work equally well in all circumstances so the teacher must determine which plan, or combination of plans, is most suitable to his purposes. The research included a study of errors made in writing done by secondary school students as well as a tabulation in my high school English composition classes during a school term. From these evolved the seven errors most frequently made by secondary school students. Also, the National Council of Teachers of English was most helpful in providing source material.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Roberta Stout, chairman of the graduate committee, and to Dr. Verna Parish, who served as chairman in Dr. Stout's absence. Also I wish to express appreciation to the committee members, Miss Alice Morrison, Dr. Robert Marple, and Dr. Leonard Thompson, for their constructive criticism.
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND METHODS USED

Although excellent written communication is composed by secondary school students, the bulk of it needs improvement. Lack of fundamental knowledge, little inherent ability, and no interest in writing contribute to the poor quality of composition done by secondary school pupils and it is the responsibility of the English teacher to correct these errors.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this paper is to compile, in one unified survey, examples of errors made by students in written composition, and some methods which have proved successful in correcting these errors.

Importance of the study. It is important for one to write well. Letters, reports, and various kinds of communications all demand skill and this survey presents methods which have proven beneficial in teaching secondary school students to become more proficient in writing.
II. ORGANIZATION

By keeping a record of the mistakes made most often in the English classes of a small secondary school during one school term and by studying textbooks, I have found that seven faults are prevalent: (1) incomplete and run-on sentences, (2) wrong use of tense, (3) misuse of punctuation, (4) incorrect spelling, (5) non-adherence to main ideas, (6) incorrect use of case, and (7) the omission of needed words. Many attempts have been made to correct these faults in writing and various methods have been tried and discarded, or tried and improved until they have become effective teaching tools.

Successful methods have been advanced by the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English; the University of Kansas; the University High School of Urbana, Illinois; Silvy Kraus, the Groucher College Conference; the language arts program of the Pittsburgh public schools, the New England Association of Teachers; the Cranbrook School of Bloomfield, Michigan; the State University of New York College for Teachers; the University of California; Ells High School, Richmond, Virginia; Westinghouse High School, Pittsburgh,

1Otis Rural High School, Otis, Kansas.
Pennsylvania; Evanston Township High School; Grand Rapids School; and the James Hillhouse High School at New Haven, Connecticut. These methods will be developed later.

A summary of methods of evaluation, a discussion of how to deal with individual differences, the value of research writing, and aids in theme writing are presented. The concluding section concerns the value of this survey to high school teachers, to college teachers, and to parents.
SEVEN MOST COMMON ERRORS

While there are many errors made in the writing of secondary school students, there are seven errors prevalent enough to justify special study. These errors, and ways to correct them, may be summed up briefly.

INCOMPLETE AND RUN-ON SENTENCES

One of the most frequent errors in writing is the use of a sentence fragment or incomplete sentence. J. C. Tressler defines the sentence fragment thus: "When a period is used after a part of a sentence that does not make complete sense when standing alone, the fraction of a sentence is called a sentence fragment."\(^2\) A run-on sentence has two or more complete thoughts punctuated incorrectly as one sentence. The three types of run-on sentences are (1) those that have no separating punctuation, (2) those that have only a comma between the parts, and (3) those that have and or so repeated as

connectives. Thus it becomes necessary to know the difference between a clause and a phrase in order to avoid this error. The student must be aware of the fact that a clause is a group of words having a subject and a predicate while a phrase is simply a group of words having no subject or predicate. Keeping this distinction in mind, the student can avoid the run-on sentence by using end punctuation after every principal clause with its modifiers unless it is definitely connected with another principal clause to form a compound sentence. When the student realizes he has a run-on sentence, he may correct it by putting the ideas into separate sentences, combining the ideas into a compound sentence or rewording one of the ideas into a phrase or a dependent clause.

WRONG USE OF TENSE

The use of two different tenses in the same sentence is a common error. The student begins with a present tense verb and then in the same sentence shifts to a past tense verb. Here knowledge of conjugation is an aid to better writing as it demands a knowledge of

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the principal parts of verbs as well as proper verb forms. It is necessary to drill on conjugation until it is so firmly fixed in the pupil's mind that he automatically uses the correct form. Another frequent error is the omission of the past tense ending such as:

I ask the boy for a quarter.

Instead of:

I asked the boy for a quarter.

This omission results frequently from carelessness and may be corrected by emphasizing and insisting upon the proofreading of the final draft.

MISUSE OF PUNCTUATION

Secondary school students have a tendency to omit quotation marks in their writing as well as a tendency to use too many commas. Since punctuation rules may be found in textbooks and handbooks, it is not feasible to include rules here. However, an interesting way to begin the study of punctuation is to give the following lines to the students and tell them to punctuate the sentences to make sense.

Every lady in this land
Has twenty nails upon each hand
Five and twenty on hands and feet
All this is true without deceit.
Another one of equal interest is:

Our hero enters on his head
His helmet on his feet
His sandals on his brow
A cloud in his right hand
And his trusty sword in
His eye a savage gleam.

This one also is attention getting:

A funny old man told this to
me. I fell in a snowdrift
in June said he I went to
a ball game out in the sea
I saw a jelly fish float up
a tree I found some gum in a
cup of tea I stirred my milk
with a big brass key I opened
my door on my bended knee I
beg your pardon for this said
he but tis true when told as
it ought to be be it is a drill
in punctuation you see.

The difference a comma makes is illustrated thus:

Woman, without her, man is savage.
Woman, without her man, is savage.

or

Let's eat Grandma!
Let's eat, Grandma.

or

While I was cooking, Alvin, the baby began to cry.
While I was cooking Alvin, the baby began to cry.
While I was cooking, Alvin the baby, began to cry.
or

It's my turn to push, Uncle Bill.
It's my turn to push Uncle Bill. 4

These examples show the need for punctuation better than a lecture by the teacher on the importance of punctuation. Another effective way to encourage correct usage is to have the students punctuate sentences which are given to them devoid of punctuation marks. Also constant correction of errors on themes serves as a constant reminder to improve punctuation.

INCORRECT SPELLING

We are all familiar with the student who can conceive excellent ideas for writing and can organize his thoughts but who cannot spell correctly. On the other extreme, we have the pupil who is letter-perfect in spelling but has no idea of the meaning of the word he can spell correctly. Somewhere in between we have the students who make "careless" mistakes—those little errors that occur because the student hasn't stopped to think before he writes.

In order to help the student become a better speller the teacher should know some of the basic reasons for spelling difficulties.

D. D. Durrell\(^5\) believes spelling difficulties usually result from the child's lack of development of the following basic abilities:

1. Ability to understand the meaning of the word to be spelled. It should be determined at the very first whether or not the word has meaning or motivation for the student. Word association tests can determine this.

2. Ability to spell "by ear." A pupil should be able to write the essential parts of a word upon hearing it, even though the word may not be spelled phonetically. Ability in auditory analysis of words can be discovered by dictating selected unfamiliar words with these instructions: "The words to spell are new to you. I want to see whether you can spell them just as they sound. Listen carefully and then write the words exactly as they sound." The words chosen should be spelled as they sound, even though the students may never have heard them before. Use words of three to five syllables. Usually ten words are sufficient to determine difficulties. Score the list in terms of the presence of the essential sounds in each word. Notice whether syllables are added, omitted, or put in wrong order.

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If a student has difficulty in writing phonetic words from an auditory presentation, he needs ear training. When ear training is given, the child should understand that although there are letters from each sound, certain sounds are represented by various letters. He should understand that many words must be remembered entirely as visual wholes and that sounding cannot be depended upon.

3. Ability to visualize word elements. Visual memory is tested by presenting visually ten to twenty unfamiliar non-phonetic words and asking the student to write them from memory. The test should be scored exactly, all deviations from the original spelling being counted as errors. Rapid word-writing in sentences tends to make correct spelling more automatic. This exercise aids, too, in transferring spelling to composition since the student automatically writes the words correctly.

4. Ability in speed of handwriting. Speed of handwriting is important for automatic, accurate spelling. While rapid writers make spelling errors, students with spelling difficulties are often slow writers. To measure handwriting speed, have the pupil copy from a book for two minutes with these directions, "Write as rapidly as you
can, but be sure you write clearly enough for it to be read easily." Usually handwriting speed is improved by this method.

5. Ability to transfer from the spelling lesson to the written composition. Failure of spelling skill to transfer to composition often results when the words learned in spelling lessons are not used in composition. Another cause of failure in transfer is inadequate mastery of words. Correct spelling in composition can be improved by dictating sentences in the spelling lesson rather than using individual words written in a column.

6. Ability to avoid systematic errors. For students having extreme spelling difficulties, tabulations may be made of the nature of errors. In this tabulation it should be noted whether the error relates to words spelled phonetically or to words spelled unphonetically. Consonant errors, vowel errors, orientation errors, and omission of syllables may all be included in the tabulation.

After these basic abilities have been enlarged upon, the teacher is ready to concentrate on methods of spelling. Ralph M. Williams, of the English department of Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, developed a procedure to use in his college freshman class and he thinks it may be easily adapted to secondary schools. To begin with,
Mr. Williams points out that all words, as far as spelling is concerned, fall into three groups:

1. Phonetic words which is the largest group and doesn't need to be studied very much.
2. Non-phonetic words which are covered by spelling generalizations.
3. The "demons" which need to be studied individually.

Mr. Williams combines phonic generalizations with spelling generalizations and uses a spelling notebook as the core of the procedure. On the last page of the notebook the students list words they have misspelled in papers. The first page of the notebook is a title page followed by a two-page spread devoted to one sound and its phonograms and pertinent generalizations with a list of illustrative words. The notebook begins with the letters b, h, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, and w because they are perfectly phonetic. The next assignment is to the sounds made by two different phonograms.

Mr. Williams believes generalizations should be presented inductively so the student will learn to apply them naturally. Practice should be provided to distinguish between short vowels and drill in syllabication should be presented.

The "demon" should be analyzed carefully and all its sounds discussed. Emphasis should be placed on the visual, auditory and
kinesthetic coordination of the word. The students first look at the word to determine the syllables. Then the word is spelled aloud twice after which it is erased and spelled in unison once more. It is then checked for correctness and if a mistake has been made, the process is repeated until the student writes the word correctly three times in succession. ⁶

Daily drill on work lists is one way to improve poor spelling. Lists may be compiled from words used in student-written papers. This plan, even though it has the advantage of using words familiar to the student, has the disadvantage of not increasing the student's vocabulary. Word lists may be composed of words found in daily newspapers, in magazines, or in books. The student's literature text provides a good source and many publishing companies print spelling books and workbooks designed to improve spelling. The list varies with the ability of class members and the amount of time devoted to learning to spell. The teacher should remember that, if the list is too long and the time too short, the student will become discouraged and will soon not even attempt the seemingly impossible

task. On the other hand, if the list is too short or too simple, the pupil will lose interest and become bored. Since ability varies from one group to another, the teacher will have to determine the best method for each class by the trial-and-error method.

Another effective method of improving spelling calls attention to misspelled words in the actual writing of students. The student then corrects the word and returns the paper to the teacher. Susan McClelland, who teaches English in Kansas City, Missouri, says that she achieves better results in spelling by concentrating on the errors made in paragraphs written by the students. The following spelling helps may also prove useful.

1. Put i before e
   Except after c
   Or when sounded like a
   As in neighbor or weigh.
   Exception: Neither the weird financier nor the foreigner seizes leisure at its height.
2. If a word ends in a silent e, drop the e when adding a suffix beginning with a vowel.
   Exception: When the word ends in ce or ge and -ous or -able is added, the e is kept.
3. If a word ends in -y preceded by a consonant, change the y to i before adding suffix, but if y is preceded by a vowel, there is no change in spelling.
4. Proper nouns usually retain the spelling of the singular form.
5. Words ending in s, sh, ch, x, or z add -es to form the plural.

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6. If word ends in o preceded by a vowel, add s; if o is preceded by a consonant, add -es.
7. Most musical terms just add s for the plural.
8. To make the plural of words ending in i or ie, change the suffix to -ves.

The use of phonetics may prove beneficial. By "sounding out" each syllable the student is able to hear the word better and will not be as likely to omit entire syllables. The formation of plurals should be explained carefully. An important phase of spelling often neglected is the learning of the meaning of a word. This becomes easy to do when word lists are used. An assignment to include the meaning of the word as well as its use in a sentence follows an explanation of the connotative meaning of the word. Quite often students have a general idea of the meaning of a word but they do not understand the specific use of it. Drill in sentence writing can be coordinated to include words commonly misspelled, thus accomplishing improvement in spelling as well as improvement in sentence structure.

NON-ADHERENCE

Two problems confronting the teacher of composition involve the tendency of pupils to choose a topic too broad to be covered in a theme, and the tendency to stray from the topic after it has been narrowed to reasonable limits. The student often has to be shown
that "Music" or "Animals" is too inclusive a term to be the subject of a thousand word theme but that "Beethoven's Influence on Jazz" or "A Famous Race Horse" can be developed satisfactorily. After the topic has been limited, the concern for adherence to the subject arises. Practice in writing is most constructive and the following method for improving paragraph writing has proved successful. On Monday the class makes a choice of topic sentences which may vary from "What I Did Last Week-end" to "My Trip to the Moon." The papers, handed in at the end of the session, form the basis of the week's work. The teacher begins by concentrating on one or two types of errors. A list of sentences from the paragraphs illustrating the error constitutes the assignment for Tuesday when the student uses the textbook to verify the corrections. Using the student's name should be avoided in discussing the errors for it can serve no useful purpose and may cause embarrassment. The importance of this assignment lies in its emphasis upon what will be stressed during the remainder of the week. Spelling and the general improvement of writing, including punctuation and the use of transition words, comprise the course of study until Friday when the paragraph is re-written and handed in for final analysis and grading.
While the omission of words in theme writing is not a grammatical error, it constitutes a problem in the teaching of writing to secondary school students. This omission of words is probably caused by the students' thinking faster than they write. Proofreading is the answer. Requiring the students to read their work slowly aloud will help them catch errors. This reading aloud by the student leads him to revising what is written. By reading aloud, the student can hear how his writing sounds and thus learns to smooth out transitions and to strike out all unnecessary and ambiguous words.

Another problem closely associated with the omission of words is the confusing of sounds and forms in words such as "would of" for "would have" and "kinda" for "kind of." This also stems from the use of dialectal expressions and by calling attention to them as they are made, the teacher can usually eliminate them. Also, careful proofreading helps to overcome this difficulty.


ERRORS IN CASE

Difficulty with case usually concerns pronouns. Don Wolfe reprints a list of grammatical errors compiled for the English Journal by Henry Harap which includes a summation of errors made in the use of case with pronouns. These are listed thus:

1. The subject is not in the nominative case.
2. The predicate nominative is not in the nominative case.
3. The wrong case is used for pronouns after than and as and as well as.
4. The object of a preposition is not in the objective case.
5. The object of a verb is not in the objective case.9

"The one major source of difficulty comes in the use of two pronouns together, or in the use of a noun and pronoun together," states J. N. Hook. He explains by saying that a student who would never say "Me did it," sometimes says "Him and me did it" and the student who would not say "Mother sent I" thinks it is correct to say "Mother sent Mary and I." Mr. Hook feels such errors may be corrected by having the students build sentences such as:

I won, He and I won. Bill and I won. May, Bill, and I won. He asked me. He asked John and me. He asked her and me. This is for me. This is for you and me. This is for her and me. 10

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10 Ibid, p. 343.
Throughout the teaching of case, the teacher should keep in mind that the English language is still changing and that it is not necessarily becoming worse because of these changes. Usage permits "It is I" or "It is me". "It is me" is almost universal, especially in the Middle West, according to Don Wolfe. The reason for this change is that the English sentence follows the subject-verb-object pattern so writers tend to follow this manner of thinking.

It is desirable to explain to the students why these changes occur and give them other examples of how the language has changed. Usage determines the range of choice and discrimination in the use of language, according to Robert Pooley. He thinks the specific business of usage is to determine what choices are made in the use of English and then to analyze the social and psychological forces which determine the choices.

The usage of whom makes an interesting discussion. It is a common belief that whom is an affectation and generally used incorrectly. J. N. Hook goes so far as to suggest teachers stop

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teaching *whom* to most students and teach it only to those who are the most intelligent or expect to go to college where it will be expected of them. When in doubt about which to use, *who* or *whom*, the student should consider only how the word is used in the clause in which it appears.

\[14\text{ Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Teachers have become increasingly aware of the need for improvement in the writing of secondary school students and so, individually or working in groups, they have evolved various methods to assist students in becoming better writers.

KENTUCKY COUNCIL PLAN

More than sixty teachers of English collaborated in setting up principles and standards in composition for high school and college students in Kentucky. William S. Ward of the Department of English at the University of Kentucky lists the nine major recommendations of the group:

1. The most effective teaching of composition should be done before—not after—a pupil writes. The teacher should anticipate the problems which students will encounter and thus save them from false starts, unexpected pitfalls and needless failure.

2. Pupils must be helped to limit their composition topics. The subject which they write about must have appeal to adolescents
and be about something with which they are reasonably familiar. The student must have a purpose and a direction and must realize that communication involves a receiver as well as a sender. After a student has chosen a suitable subject, he must limit it to a single aspect which he is able to manage. Limiting the assignment will give the student an idea of how detailed he must write. Thus "Railroads" is too broad for a 200-500 word theme but "Light signals" would serve the purpose. The teacher must make it clear that the student restrict the topic according to his own experience or reading. A statement of the theme of the paper is a help in guarding against rambling and may be placed following the title and preceding the body.

3. Pupils should have a definite audience in mind before beginning. Too often the student feels he is writing only to his teacher and the wise instructor explains to his students that he would not write the same paper for the Truckdrivers' Union meeting that he would write for the Ladies' Garden Club even on the same topic. To begin with the pupil should write to his peers but later choose other audiences and develop a growing consciousness of the needs and peculiarities of them.
4. An outline is fundamental to straight thinking and good organization. The outline need not be carried beyond the level of the Arabic numeral subdivision as the student is merely making a guide, not a first draft. The outline should reveal the sense of the entire theme and the parts should be significantly related to each other and the whole theme. Both the topic and the sentence outline are useful aids in writing. The topic outline is perhaps most useful when the writing is simple and the relationship of details obvious to both writer and reader. On the other hand, the sentence outline is preferred for subjects difficult to arrange mechanically. Subject matter requiring detailed analysis and expression demands the sentence outline. From this the deduction is made that the sentence outline is the most effective for all except the simplest topics.

5. A portion, at least, of the writing should be done in class or in a writing laboratory. This enables the student to work where he has the necessary supplies and a reasonably quiet place. Also this provides a supervised writing period where the student gets advise and help, particularly with first drafts.

6. Major emphasis should be on exposition but attention should also be given to description, narration and argumentation. This leads to paragraph writing. Straight thinking and logical
organization can be taught by giving students practice in following the logical methods of developing a paragraph. Each paragraph should contain a topic sentence, which may be developed by comparisons, contrasts, examples, definitions, cause or effects, or until a combination of methods is used. Each paragraph must develop a clearcut stage of the subject and the parts be so well-ordered that the reader may understand the subject as the writer wishes him to understand it.

7. Marginal notations and terminal comment are important contributions to the pupil’s understanding of his writing problems and the correcting of them. Identifying and correcting errors in the margin is quite common practice but the Kentucky plan goes further by suggesting that the teacher write an evaluation of the theme as a whole in which strengths as well as weaknesses are noted. The advocates of this plan feel the terminal comment is probably the most important contribution to the student’s understanding of his writing problems. Marginal comments should be used with the evaluation at the end showing the student how his mistakes have affected the aim or purpose of his paper. The terminal comment can be so written that it will encourage the student to self-criticism.

8. Students must achieve a reasonable mastery of both content and mechanics if they are to receive a passing grade. A student
should write in ink, with a legible hand, and within a frame of regular margins. He should follow directions about spacing a title, indenting paragraphs, and endorsing. Capitalization, spelling and punctuation must be considered. Specifically, high school graduates should know punctuation rules and how to apply them.

9. Conferences with individual students should help them with their personal writing problems and class instruction should concern general difficulties. When a student has a paper returned to him, he should be required to rewrite it so that he may fully learn from his writing experience. This revision may mean only a few minor corrections or it may mean a complete rewriting, depending upon the original work done. A well-planned conference with the student concerning his writing should do orally what the marginal notes and evaluations do in writing. The conference should relate the student's weaknesses and strengths to the overall intention of his theme. Mechanics should be given as much time as necessary, but it is more important that the student be taught to express well what he is trying to say. He should be made to feel that the conference purposes to help him write more individualized and interesting themes rather than to check mechanics. Conferences should be held with the better students as well as with those less able to write. The more capable
students can be given thought-provoking topics for future papers; they can be told different ways to express themselves, and they can be given additional instruction and assignments. The purpose of the conference is to point out the student's weaknesses and strengths, to give him greater insight into his writing problems and to help him overcome his difficulties.15

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS PLAN

At a conference16 on composition and literature held at the University of Kansas in October, 1957, English teachers concluded that imaginative writing is a means of developing an appreciation and a liking for literature and that after completing several units on writing, the student should find literature to be more understandable. Writing forces the student to put something of himself, of his own judgment of life, on paper. He learns to be careful of what he wants his evaluation of life to be and writing serves as a means for learning not to manipulate fellow human beings in undue fashion.


16Fifth Annual Conference on Composition and Literature in High School and College held at Kansas University.
The student will become more respectful towards words and their power and more accurate in his observation of factual truth and sensory appeals. The student who writes imaginatively will realize the value of creative work and will gain a "new respect for the materials of the writer: the universe, himself, humanity, and God."\(^{17}\)

Among the professional points agreed upon at the conference three applied specifically to creative writing:

1. Opportunities for creative writing should be offered to the slow as well as the superior student.

Since the group felt the greater obligation of teaching is to the large segment of high school students who will not go to college, these students must be given a chance. Even poorer students need an audience, perhaps as much as the gifted student, but this audience can be given to him through creative writing. Writing will help the poorer student develop his ideas just as much as it will help the more capable child.

2. Literature may be used as a "springboard" to creative writing.

This point may be accomplished by having the class study examples of the varying quality of literature. From this the student learns something of the authors and why they wrote as they did. Next, passages may be read aloud with students writing comments about how they feel about what they have heard. Following this, the students write about themselves and about things that are familiar to them. The teacher should not force her ideals or standards but let the student know someone is sympathetic to his stories, his words, and his ideas.

3. A split grade on written composition, one for mechanics and one for ideas, helps.

In grading, all marks should be for guiding, not punishing. The teacher should let the student know there is always some good in every paper and place the comment first and then the grade and be sure to comment in some way on all papers.

urbana, illinois plan

At the University High School, Urbana, Illinois, a plan to utilize the abilities of students is used. Feeling the need of a substitute for a teacher-dominated system of checking creative writing, a student-participation plan has been effective in improving creative writing. This plan begins with students working out their
own set of standards which may be fairly elementary, but meaningful to students. On the day before compositions are due, and before the teacher has marked them, the students divide into groups and exchange papers and write comments (on a separate sheet) about the paper each is reading. Since few teachers have ample time to comment thoroughly, this often gives the student a point the teacher may have missed and it also has the advantage of criticism seen from the students' level.

Having each group present a paper orally to the entire class provides the enjoyment of listening to classmates' efforts and also gives an excellent opportunity for individual oral expression. The student learns various styles of writing by this oral presentation and can compare his way of writing to that of his classmates and thus learn where he can improve. Being made aware of techniques and procedures different from his own undoubtedly will be conducive to improving the student's general writing. If time is spent discussing strengths and weaknesses of various papers, the class may ultimately be led beyond the mechanics of writing into an appreciation of ideas and of style.

A class discussion may also include clarification of principles not yet mastered by the students, and the student can collect
illustrations of various principles under discussion, or the discussion may center about the individual needs as the student perceives his own failings. 18

**SILVY KRAUS PLAN**

Silvy Kraus of the University of Oregon Education Department has evolved a workable plan for the effective teaching of précis writing. The need for individualizing instruction has been emphasized in all recent language art courses and Silvy Kraus' procedures keep students together for instruction from which all can profit before dividing into groups for student comparison of one another's writing. First, the teacher presents a duplicated sheet containing various types of summary writing followed by a discussion of the distinguishing characteristics of a précis. Together the entire class composes a précis of a short prose selection with suggestions for better writing being written on the board as students submit them. These suggestions should include:

1. Read the original several times.
2. Select main ideas.
3. Without looking at the model, think through the principal ideas.

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4. Begin first draft, including the theme in first sentence. Then, using the most important ideas, explain the theme, omitting unnecessary detail.

5. Write précis in your own words.

6. Write précis so that it will be intelligible to someone who has not read the original.

7. Read first draft aloud before making second draft.

According to this plan, the class is now divided into groups of three students each. Writing ability is the basis of the grouping which has been planned in advance by the teacher. After a chairman has been appointed, each group collaborates in the writing of a common précis. These are then analyzed in a class discussion followed by individual précis writing which maybe used to judge the individual student's progress. This method can be used for teaching any type of composition, with students being grouped according to their ability in executing the skill being undertaken. To the objections that grouping within the classroom takes too much preparation and that students do not do well in groups, the Kraus plan offers the following comments:

1. Group teaching is so productive that pupil achievement, relaxed classroom atmosphere, and absence of discipline problems more than compensate for the time needed.

2. Besides learning to write, the students are learning self-discipline by working in a group of peers.
3. Be sure both teacher and student are ready for group work and understand thoroughly what is to be accomplished.
4. Since the groups are constantly changed, there is no stigma attached to grouping.
5. Group work should not be used when another procedure will produce better results.
6. Grouping usefulness is limited only by the teacher's ingenuity.19

GROUCHER COLLEGE CONFERENCE

The subject of a panel discussion by high school and college English teachers held in 1958 at Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland, was "How to Teach Students to Write." In opening the discussion Edward J. Gordon declared, "I think the best types of things that kids should write about are things they know about."

The group went on to express the belief that a student's reading could also serve as a stimulus for writing. By reading a story based on simple, everyday life in which the significance of something is made plain, the student may be helped to see what is significant in his own experiences and how to write about them.

Gordon then posed two questions:

1. What do students write about?
2. How are they given a sense of purpose?

He answered these questions by stating that descriptions are too abstract because the student does not see relationships between the things he is looking at. To write good description, Gordon continued, one must write about that which he really sees. The problem is to get people to see things, to get them to really look carefully at what they see. He also feels that a great difficulty in bad papers is that the person is manipulating words separate from the meaning, with "meaning" referring to the things the writer sees and hears.

Dorothy Young of the English Department of Hunter College High School asserted reading material influences what students write about. Reading, according to her, should be related to the student's own experience or it should enable him to understand the experience provided by the reading. If what the student reads is based upon everyday occurrences with something significant in the occurrence, the student is helped to see how he can write about an everyday experience he has had. The newspaper is of tremendous value to stimulate choosing of subject matter. Many letters written in newspapers furnish the worst examples of how to present an argument in print. Thus, in a negative manner, the student learns to write.

Anna J. De Armand, a college professor of English at the University of Delaware, stated that every theme she receives is
corrected and returned to the student who in turn must make all corrections and then hand paper in again. This, she feels, eliminates the careless glancing at a paper and the tossing of it into the waste-basket. Also, the student is spurred to correct the error which he originally made. While this might not be a necessity for all themes handed in, Miss De Armond felt it worthwhile for at least part of them to be handled in this manner.

Gordon told of his use of the opaque projector in teaching composition. A paper was projected on a screen and the class discussed what the writer tried to say and how he had expressed himself. The paper was folded so the writer was not identified. He then had bright and slow pupils exchange papers and write long notes to one another telling what they thought was right and wrong about the paper. Another device used by Gordon was to put an asterisk in the margin by an idea that is not clear and when the papers are returned, students who have asterisks on their papers go to the board and write the faulty sentences. Then other members of the class rewrite and try to improve the imperfect sentences.  

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PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A successful writing program must provide frequent opportunities for boys and girls to practice writing according to Lois M. Grose, Senior Supervisor of the Language Arts in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Miss Grose suggests an average of 250 words every week from each pupil but where the teaching load is excessive, the time may have to be extended to two weeks. Using teaching devices which save time and yet give effective results is recommended. For example, one writing skill may be concentrated upon in each paper and the evaluation be based upon that skill. The use of the opaque projector and student-checking of papers save time but nothing can change the fact that the "way to learn to write is to write, and write often."

As students write, revise and file their compositions, they should be aware of taking progressive steps. Assignments should proceed from subject to related subjects and a continuity of skill maintained. For example, a first paragraph of description may stress color details, the second may emphasize sounds while a third paragraph may include details of smell, taste, or touch. The final paragraph may include a variety of sensory impressions. In other words, the scope and difficulty of the writing should steadily increase.
Miss Grose believes practical forms of writing should be included in the writing program. Personal letters should be equivalent to good conversation and children should learn to write this type of correspondence. The writing of the correct form of business letter should be habitual as well as writing the minutes of a meeting, taking notes on an article or lecture, and writing an item for the newspaper. At the same time the student is getting practice in writing minutes, the entire class can be getting practice in parliamentary procedure. An imaginary situation may be set up in which the real procedures are followed with students taking turns at performing the various duties.

Whether or not the research paper should be taught in high school is a question for much discussion. However, Miss Grose feels the reasons college teachers object to its being touched in high school—plagiarism, using only one source, no originality—are habits developed in high school, and this is the very reason why training should be begun as far back as the seventh grade. She recommends a controlled situation, in which the teacher gives mimeographed sheets containing passages from three sources relating to the same topic. The child is to take notes and then write a brief report in his own words, but giving credit in a bibliography. This process proceeds
from a simple report to the reference theme which must be taken from various sources and which requires a conclusion drawn by the student.

This leads to the question of creative writing. Miss Grose defines creative writing as "any writing which gives original expression to the thoughts and emotions of the writer." This type of writing should never be forced and particularly not in the field of short story, dramatic sketch, or poetry writing. However, gifted or interested pupils should be encouraged and helped in these forms of writing. Before the student attempts the short story, he should be led to think in terms of the motivations of people he knows as well as their conflicts. Preceding the writing of the short story, the student should write the dialogue and select the plot situation. The preliminary work for poetry writing includes the study of figures of speech. Jingles which have only rhyme should not be accepted.

Not only are students to be taught to think and write logically but they should be taught to think imaginatively and creatively in order to get the maximum benefit from their writing. Expository writing may be stressed by the writing of book evaluations (not book reports which too often are a simple retelling of the plot), and evaluations of TV programs, movies, concerts, art exhibits, lectures, recordings and any other form of art with which a student may be familiar.
The Language Arts Program of the Pittsburgh Public Schools also emphasizes that "young writers need and deserve an audience." This may be provided by setting aside a certain day for reading the best work or, if a wider audience is desired, a mimeographed booklet of the best writings may be assembled and distributed to anyone interested. The booklet can be put out at little cost and makes a permanent record of superior writing. Also it has the advantage of making the parents and general public aware of the quality of the writing done by students.  

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION

Effective methods of teaching composition were discussed at a New England Association of Teachers meeting and reported on in the December, 1958, issue of The English Leaflet. According to a survey, three or four themes a month are required of English students in New England high schools. While this was sufficient in quantity, the quality of the writing needed improving. Plans to accomplish this improvement included (1) the distribution of mimeographed copies of a faulty theme which the students correct as best they can after

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which mimeographed copies of the same theme, corrected and re-written by the teacher, is handed to the student. The two papers are carefully compared and various possibilities in style or content are discussed. (2) The entire class writes short compositions with six being written on the chalkboard. The compositions are then analyzed with emphasis concentrated on punctuation, content, or whatever aspect the teacher wishes. (3) Weak sentences are bracketed on the theme and these sentences are placed on the board and the entire class cooperates in revising them. This gives the teacher an excellent opportunity to explain the many different ways in which a sentence may be written and the class learns there is more than one way to express thoughts effectively. 22

CRANBROOK PLAN

"Composition begins with the need to say something," states Carl G. Wonnberger, head of the English department in the Cranbrook School, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. He adds that while workbooks, exercises, drills, diagramming and the study of language may have a place in a general cultural pattern, they have nothing to do with

learning to write. He gives three points to consider in teaching written composition:

1. The collecting and storing of impressions gained through the senses.
2. The intellectual and emotional "strain out" of new impressions as they assimilate with the old.
3. The emergence of the initial impression so that it can be given a final polish.

Wonnberger stresses the sharpening of observation as an essential to becoming a better writer. To train perception, exercises such as line drawings full of erroneous detail—wheels left off cars, traffic lights with no visible support, badgeless policemen, and similar oddities—bring improvement. Frequent practice of recalling what one says, does, experiences, and thinks is another way to improve observation. Students may be asked to carry small notebooks to jot down ideas which occur to them in public vehicles, doctors' offices, or during moments of idleness. The student should be encouraged to keep a notebook on hand while he is reading so he can copy the best ideas and phrases. Thus the power of perception is trained and experience in writing is gained. Observation may be improved by showing the class an object and letting them study it carefully for a few minutes. The object is then concealed and the students write a detailed description of it. When the object is displayed again, the students compare their work with the actual object.
Wonnberger urges caution in using the study of literary style as an approach to writing. One of the most serious mistakes made by beginning teachers is to attempt to push students into advanced criticism and evaluation before they are adequately prepared. Concerning vocabulary Wonnberger feels it is foolish to derange ordinary expression by using words simply because they are long or unfamiliar. He says there is only one way to enlarge one's vocabulary:

.. . to enlarge one's experience through travel, the arts, social service, politics, hobbies of many kinds, and above all, reading, through which one may get vicarious experience wider and more varied than one could get in a thousand years of living.

Another caution concerns clearness in writing. The teacher can help by pointing out the cliché, hazy sentences, trite epithets, and lingo which creeps into writing. "Thinclad" in referring to an athlete, "pigskin" meaning a football, and "hoopster" in reference to a basketball player illustrate commonly used phrases. Confusing statements, such as a medicine that relieves "twice as fast" or a cigarette that "tastes better," need clarifying. Even though the student hears this diction constantly in TV commercials, he must be informed about their usage in writing.

There are two kinds of "decencies" which Wonnberger points out to be observed. The first concerns matters of truth, reasoning,
and accurate observation and the second considers social conformity. Spelling, punctuation, and usage are included in this second "decency." He uses a style sheet to insure observance of the rules and urges each student to keep one at hand when he writes.²³

"NATURAL" METHOD

Calling his method the "natural" method to teach students to write more effectively, William D. Baker has evolved a plan for accomplishing his purpose. In his opinion the grammatical rule method and the scientific linguistic method fail to teach pupils to write effectively. Both methods use analysis and while Baker concedes that analysis is interesting, it is not very useful to writing well. He sees the teacher's job as one to help the student be "able to immerse himself in a world of wholesome language." To aid students reach this goal, Baker has each one keep a notebook of daily language activities. The first few pages of the notebook are devoted to a record of their "deliberate" language activities for each day.

The rest of the notebook is divided into five sections thus:

1. A record of the material that has been read aloud each day. Reading aloud gives students a feeling for language, impresses the sound of good prose upon them, makes them aware of the rhythm of basic sentences, lets them hear the natural idiom of English as good writers use it and aids students in making their expression more effective.

2. Passages copies from daily reading other than textbooks. Joseph Addison, Benjamin Franklin, Somerset Maugham and Bertrand Russell used this technique. This gives practice in writing as a professional does.

3. A listing is made of passages memorized. Here the aim is not the exact reproduction of a passage but a pinpointing of the passage as a whole by recalling the main idea first, then the supporting ideas and finally the details. The test of writing comes when the student reproduces the passage in writing and then checks his recall ability by comparing his reproduction with the original.

4. Lists of personal observations are compiled. This section contains a list of notes on what the student sees, hears, smells or otherwise notes as he walks down a familiar street. Other suggestions for making lists include rooms lived in, times afraid, things made, teachers had, places to remember, happy times, sad times, and book read.

5. Free association themes are written. In this type of theme the student is encouraged to write his observations about that which he knows. If he puts down on paper what he really thinks and feels, his writing becomes a means of self-expression rather than a duty.

These five points form the nucleus of Baker's plan and the activities of the course are based on the notebook and its contents.
At the end of the term the notebook is graded. The activities are supplemented with the conventional methods of teaching composition in regard to choosing and limiting the subject, defining, developing ideas, and evaluation.

EVANS PLAN

The difference between "composition" and "writing" taught in classrooms led Bertrand Evans of the English department at the University of California to devise a plan to teach composition. Bertrand believes that giving more writing assignments only proliferates mediocre writing. Even though he does not disparage from the merits of teaching done in secondary schools, he does feel that teachers have many times unwittingly employed methods that impede creativity. This has tended to leave the impression with the student that all he needs for a composition is a large topic, narrowed down, organized by outlining, and written in complete sentences. Because of this, the student rarely writes in units larger than a sentence and while the paper may be mechanically perfect, there is no "composition." Somehow, students must be made to understand there can be

no composition without an idea. Whatever the answer is to how to get them to understand this, it most certainly does not consist of giving the student a topic to write on, mechanical instruction in "narrowing" a topic, outlining, and a lecture on unity and coherence.

An idea which requires the student to think of reasons instead of facts is conducive to "composing" while an assigned topic results in "writing." A topic such as "My Home Town" is expanded to an idea when presented thus: "My home town is an exciting place to live." However, this is not the complete solution because the student is given an idea which he himself has not thought of and thus he is limited to the development of another person's idea. This device can also oblige the student to support a theory that he does not believe to be true. For example, the teacher may have given the statement "Hamlet's conduct in the scene with his mother shows him to be raving mad" when the student actually believes Hamlet to have been completely sane. Evans suggests providing only the frame of an idea as "Hamlet's conduct in the scene with his mother shows him to be . . . ." In this manner the student develops his own rather than an imposed idea. Evans suggests another method which utilizes neither an idea nor a topic. The teacher presents two or three widely separated statements and tells the students to integrate
the sentences into one paragraph without using either as a topic sentence. Examples of factual statements consist of (1) "Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system" and (2) "Among the richest resources of the Pacific Northwest are its forests of Douglas fir."

This method may seem cruel to the student who finds himself unable to write a word until he unifies the two sentences, but through this he learns to "compose," rather than "write." Masterpieces should not be expected as the plan is only a device and should be used as such. He recommends a discussion concerning the time students deliberated before writing and the thoughts they had before they began writing. This process fosters the realization that ideas are necessary to composition. As a result of his method the students will "compose" if they are given an idea and they will also "compose" if given disparate elements which spur them on to seek a unifying idea. Thus "composition" is instilled in the minds of the students. 

ELLIS HIGH SCHOOL PLAN

Victor Pudlowski of Ells High School in Richmond, Virginia, advocates a "composition outline" method to help students improve

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their skill in composition. Symbols represent the aspects the students are to stress:

**TS** - topic sentence. At first the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of each paragraph and when the student has become aware of them, he is taught to vary the location.

**11** - paragraph. The paragraph must be correct length and of good construction.

**Link** - transition words. Such words as however, moreover, and furthermore progress to the use of phrases as on the other hand, in other words, in fact to show smooth transition from one paragraph to another.

**AW** - ambiguous word or phrase. If there are no ambiguous expressions, the student is communicating something significant.

To insure practice of these principles the students underline the "TS," circle the "AW" and draw a box around the "link." From this beginning the student develops a paper of several paragraphs in which he utilizes the symbols. In addition, the student lists the specific ideas which support the generalization. These ideas are used as topic sentences of the paragraphs which follow; subsequently, the pupil learns to reinforce generalizations with supporting statements. The concluding paragraph consists of the generalization being the topic sentence with the topic sentences of the preceding paragraphs supporting the generalization. This "outline" method is restrictive and repetitive but repetition of ideas aids the student in learning to express himself in various ways. By using this rigid
outline the student abstains from getting verbose but also is getting practice in techniques of writing. The use of this project in Ells High School has increased the number of interesting, informative, and well-organized papers. 26

SEQUENTIAL PLAN

Clarence W. Hach presents a plan for teaching composition in a sequential program. Since learning to write is a gradual growth process, any sequential writing program must be planned with a knowledge of the ultimate goals and with the knowledge of what the function of the various levels of schooling will be in fulfilling these goals. The writing program of the three levels--elementary, junior high, and senior high--must be closely articulated if the plan is to succeed.

The elementary school must give practice in both the psychological and physiological aspects of writing. Letter formation, word formation, spelling, structure of simple sentences, must be taught at this level. Brief expository and narrative writing are also

urged at this level by the Basic Issues Conferences. After learning the prerequisites, the student is ready to practice writing and this should begin extensively at the junior high, or seventh grade, level. Here the student begins a formal study of both narrative and expository paragraphs. The students learn to begin a paragraph with an interesting, specific sentence. They also learn the fundamentals of topic outlining, using one major division and several sub-topics. Outlining familiarizes them with simple principles of organization, and since their paragraph writing will be more narrative than expository, they first study about chronological order and later learn the more simple orders necessary for effective narration: far to near, near to far, the order of increasing importance, and the general to the specific. Friendly letters and thank-you notes are written at this level. As practice in expository writing, some reporting based on reference reading should be done. To eliminate appropriating whole sections from the encyclopedia without giving any source of information, teachers should give instructions on how to take notes and how to summarize that information. This also

27The Basic Issue Conferences were a series of conferences in 1958 under the auspices of the American Studies Association, the College English Association, the Modern Language Association of America, and the National Council of Teachers of English.
prepares the child for the research themes usually required in the eleventh and twelfth grades.

At the eighth grade level narrative, expository, and descriptive paragraph writing is stressed. In order to relate the eighth grade writing to that of the seventh grade, it is necessary to spend a month or six weeks in review of types of composition taught in the seventh grade. This review includes the topic outline, narrative and expository writing particularly. Competence in writing narrative, expository and descriptive writing should be demonstrated before a long paper is attempted. In addition to paragraph writing, business letters such as letters of request, order letters and thank-you letters should be written. By the end of the eighth grade, all the form elements of both business and personal letters should be mastered. Writing which expresses the students' reactions to life can be correlated with the study of literature. Eighth grade pupils are usually eager to tell about their experiences and this type of writing often gives them a better understanding of themselves. Report writing should be continued in the eighth grade with assignments going beyond summarizing of notes into reports based on two or three references. Better students may begin to write on the similarities and differences between books.
In the ninth grade composition writing should begin with a review of the topic outline and a variety of paragraphs. Expository paragraphs developed by example, incident, reasons, comparison, and contrast should be practiced. Descriptive paragraphs which develop sensory impressions should be written. The ninth grade is a good place to learn how to write the kind of expository paragraph needed in an essay type examination because throughout their high school career, it will be necessary to utilize their skill. The introduction of the two-paragraph theme may serve as a bridge between the paragraph and the theme containing an introduction, body, and conclusion. Furthermore, transitional devices are learned during this year. A sentence such as "Swimming is an excellent sport because of the fun and exercise it provides" gives the opportunity to teach connecting paragraphs with transitions. The first paragraph would stress "fun" and the second paragraph develops "exercise" with a proper transition between the two. After the students demonstrate their ability to write short themes well, they may write longer ones, but Hack considers five paragraphs sufficiently long for a theme. An introduction, a body of three paragraphs, and a conclusion would comprise the theme. Throughout the ninth grade, the students should continue to write as many five-paragraph themes as the teacher can properly evaluate.
The tenth grade writing activities also begins with a review of basic units of composition, with a brief consideration of two-paragraph and five-paragraph theme writing. Following the review, the students begin a study of argumentative and persuasive paragraph writing, learning the techniques of critical thinking and methods of writing arguments effectively. The students learn the different positions in which to place topic sentences, and should be shown the effectiveness of the topic sentence being used as the concluding sentence. After mastering the writing of themes of argument, the tenth graders should learn to write themes of explanation. In these they tell how to make or do something. Besides learning conciseness, precise diction, and the like, students should learn techniques such as interest-catch opening paragraphs, image words, dialogue, quotations, humor, connotative verbs, and exclamatory sentences. Report writing on reference reading and literature should be continued with formal paraphrasing being added as preparation for précis writing to be done in the eleventh grade. The reports on reading should note the techniques used by author to obtain the desired effects.

At the junior or eleventh grade level précis writing is stressed. This should begin early in the year so that the student may utilize it in the study of literature as well as in the writing of a reference paper.
Hach believes there is much value in preparing and writing a reference paper, especially if the length is limited to 1,000 or 2,000 words. He justifies the compiling of a bibliography on the basis that this ability will be needed in other courses. He adds that reference papers present realistic and practical problems in distinguishing between information that must be documented and that which need not be acknowledged. The reference paper teaches students to synthesize information, to think through a mass of information, and to produce a conclusion. Hach feels the informational essay of 500-800 words is a good manner in which to make the transition from a theme to a reference paper. By relating the informational essay to factual magazine and newspaper articles, the teacher and students can analyze professionally written articles for interesting writing techniques.

Throughout the year juniors should practice writing expository, narrative, and descriptive paragraphs as well as taking essay type examinations.

The senior year begins with a review as do all the previous years. New techniques are introduced by the theme of explanation which demonstrates the relationship between cause and effect. Opportunities to use cause and effect are offered in the fields of physics, chemistry, sociology, history, art, music, and literature. Also the explanatory theme developed by analogy provides good
practice for seniors. From the explanatory theme students can advance to the essay of opinion by which they learn the difference between explanatory and argumentative opinions. Here they learn to argue effectively in writing and to present or defend a personal viewpoint. The essay of opinion leads logically to the theme of analysis in which the student examines a problem to distinguish its component parts and to show their relationship to each other and to the subject as a whole. This type of theme gives the student an opportunity to examine his own attitudes as well as complex ideas in literature. The theme of analysis stresses the difference between an attitude and a statement of fact. Criticism of communication media such as of books, plays, television programs, movies, concerts, and art exhibits is the final type of composition attempted by seniors. Here the student expresses his reaction to a real experience while developing critical judgment. If a reference paper is required, it should emphasize composition rather than mechanical skills.

Throughout the year the stress should be on longer and more involved types of composition than previously done; however, short themes and paragraphs should also be written frequently.

The sequential program of writing begins in the elementary grades and is carried on with each year developing a particular kind
of writing. During the entire time evaluation by the teacher should convey the teacher's respect for the student's efforts, and convey his concern for the pupil's ideas. The teacher should express appreciation of a well-written phrase and offer suggestions for improvement in a reasonable, not dictatorial, way. If the teacher has placed the importance of content, organization, and mechanics in that order, his evaluation should be consistent with that order of relative importance. Evaluation must be individualized to stimulate the interest of each pupil and while conferences are the ideal way to discuss a theme, it is impossible to do so for every paper. Thus the written evaluation must serve the purpose.28

GRAND RAPIDS PLAN

Carson McGuire of the School of Education at the University of Texas suggested a plan particularly recommended for slower classes. McGuire used a series of essays about personal experiences to improve writing. In order to "sound the emotional depth" a series of essays is assigned in the following order: "Three Times Happy," "Three Times Sad," "Three Times Afraid," "Three Times Angry," and

"Three Times Ashamed." As the students write their experiences, they reveal their range in abilities, temperament, interest, and aspirations. One common topic sentence is used, such as, "I have had the following three happy experiences in my life. The first happy experience was . . . ." For example, the first experience might be a picnic and so the first paragraph is concerned with the picnic only. The second paragraph contains another experience named by the topic sentence and the last paragraph tells about another experience. Since the writing is done during class time, the teacher can help any student who wants it. Thus errors are eliminated as the papers are written, obviating return of themes covered with red marks. The resulting higher grades are most encouraging to poorer students.

After completion of the essay unit, the group advances to writing a theme concerning the background of the pupil. In this theme any experience or material the pupils desire may be included. Often the idea of an illustrated paper appeals to the student and here is the opportunity to suggest such activity. Those not having photographs may illustrate with original drawings or magazine pictures. Length is of no concern in this unit as most students are so absorbed in what they are writing that they forget to count the words. A teacher
who tried this plan was amazed at the enthusiasm the students had for this assignment. Furthermore, she learned firsthand the life-situations, heartaches, and aspirations of her pupils. This made her more understanding and appreciative of each pupil as an individual. She also felt the essays were much more successful in establishing rapport with the students than through the writing of the traditional autobiography. In addition this plan gives young people a chance to write about their personal problems; in other words, the dignity of writing assures the student that his adolescent problems are worthy of attention. The students place more value on themselves, but, at the same time, they see their strengths and weaknesses in writing when they are being taught by this method.29

NEW HAVEN METHOD

Marion O. Sheridan, of the James Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Connecticut, designates writing abilities of students as "powers." All students should write to the "first power"; a large proportion should attain the "second power"; and students showing promise of becoming professional writers attain the "third power".

Sheridan recognizes the vocational, political, and social needs of secondary school students and believes it is an ethical responsibility for English teachers to teach communication in writing. Regardless of social or economic status, it is necessary for people to communicate in writing. The "power" to which they may grow depends on the students' abilities.

Writing to the first "power" involves content chiefly. This "power" is in response to the urgent need to communicate and the writing is simple, direct, and clear. The sentence, "Please send me a baseball bat," illustrates how one sentence may arouse possibilities of a chain of letters. One may be written to the effect that the bat has not come; one may say it is not the bat ordered; another may express the desire for more bats like the one received. In addition to this type of writing, the first "power" includes learning to write friendly letters and simple exposition.

Writing to the second "power" postulates comprehension of content and form with emphasis on content. At this level the writing may be imaginative, practical or journalistic. Or it may be like the writing of H. G. Wells, who said: "I write as I walk because I want to get somewhere and I write as straight as I can, just as I
walk as straight as I can, because that is the best way to get there."

The "third power" writers are those who are articulate and eager to concentrate on writing. The writer has acquired technical skill and the ability to use devices effectively. Form has achieved importance and the student feels the urgency to communicate, to inform, to persuade, or to express himself. His writing may be emotional, having subtleties, overtones, and depths not achieved by those writing at the first or second "power."

The achievement of these "powers" should evolve in such a way that the student's growth is barely perceptible to him. The aim, of course, is to have all students writing at the "third power" but the teacher must recognize the fact that not all students have the ability to attain this level. Great flexibility is demanded of the teacher in teaching writing to all three "powers." He must be patient, sympathetic, encouraging, and willing to repeat endlessly. On the other hand, he must be quick to challenge and stimulate those who can think rapidly, clearly, and logically on a broad field of material.

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Certain basic factors are necessary to develop writing to any of the three "powers." Writing is more than penmanship, and more than correct grammar usage, though both are important. The teacher must stimulate the students' curiosity and increase their perception and self-confidence. This he does by being constantly alert to the interests and knowledge of the student. Conversation is one approach to better writing. Personal experiences, observations, motion pictures, television or radio programs, or any reading done may be the starting point. After a general conversation, the class is more relaxed and willing to write as they have had the opportunity to think of their own ideas on the topic of conversation and have a desire to express themselves. To achieve power in writing, students must have respect for writing and must realize that good writing results from much rewriting. Writers such as Somerset Maugham, Ernest Hemingway, and Carl Sandburg do much revision, so it is not only the beginner who does not do his best work at the first writing. However, even time, rewriting, and good teaching do not guarantee good writing. The creative process is baffling (as evidenced by William Shakespeare, who, we are told, was not taught) and the most a teacher can do is try to develop the students' abilities to the highest "power" the student is capable of reaching.  

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31 Marion C. Sheridan, "Can We Teach Our Students to Write," *Writing Leaflet*, No. 1, NCTE, (1958).
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION

The methods presented in the preceding chapter have a common purpose—to improve the written composition of secondary school pupils. Each method approaches the problem from a different viewpoint and a plan that works well with one group in a given situation may not prove satisfactory in different circumstances. For this reason, the plans include proposals adaptable to various ability levels. These procedures have many points in common. All place content above mechanics with expositive, narrative, and descriptive writing receiving the most emphasis. Penmanship, indentation, capitalization, punctuation, spelling and margination are the mechanical aspects considered.

Abilities of the students are utilized in several plans. The Urbana, Illinois plan provides that the students evolve a set of standards. The pupils divide into groups and exchange papers. Each student writes his comments concerning the paper he is reading. This takes place before the teacher grades the paper, thus giving the advantage of getting criticism from the student level. The Goucher College Conference method varies from the above plan by having the
students write notes to one another, telling what they think is right
and wrong about the papers. The New Haven Method classified the
abilities of the students as "powers" with the first "power" having
the minimum requirements and the third "power" having the maximum
qualifications. This plan allows the student to advance according
to capability but does not attempt to push him beyond this. The
Silvy Kraus plan divides the class into groups of three students each
with writing ability being the basis for grouping. The groups collabo-
rate in writing a common composition. These are analyzed in a class
discussion after which each individual writes his own composition.

The development of keener observation is stressed in two plans.
The Cranbrook School plan utilizes line drawings and other devices to
train perception. The students are asked to keep notebooks with
them at all times so that they may jot down ideas or impressions at
the moment of perception. Carl Wonnberger, the advocate of this
plan, lists several other devices which effectively train perception.
The New Haven plan considers observation to be a good starting
point to better writing. Beginning with conversation about things
they have noticed, the students progress to writing about things
observed. Thus conversational ability is developed, observational
powers are sharpened, and writing practice is gained.
The Kentucky Council of Teachers of English plan to improve writing considers the outline fundamental. While the outline need not be carried beyond the level of the Arabic numeral and subdivision, it should reveal the sense of the theme and its parts should be related to each other as well as to the whole theme. Both topic and sentence outlines are useful aids. The topic outline is perhaps most useful when the writing is simple and the sentence outline is preferable when the subject is more difficult to arrange mechanically. Any subject matter requiring detailed analysis and expression also requires the sentence outline.

The value of reading good literature is emphasized in several plans. The University of Kansas plan maintains better writing may be obtained by having students study the varying quality of literature. From this they learn different styles of writing and become aware of individualizing their own writing. The use of literature in writing is two-fold--writing develops an appreciation and liking for literature and literature becomes more understandable after completion of several units of writing. Reading can serve as a stimulus for better writing according to the Goucher College Conference plan. By reading a story based on simple, everyday life, the student is helped to see significant events in his own experiences. The newspaper is
a powerful stimulant to choosing subject matter. Other influential sources of reading are textbooks, novels, and magazines. Carl Wonnberger, in the New Haven plan, urges caution in using the study of literary style as an approach to writing. Students must be adequately prepared before they can write well on their own and must not copy the style of another but must develop their own particular style. Writing reports on literature read is beneficial according to the Sequential Plan which starts students writing simple compositions in the seventh grade and continues through high school. Each year adds some advancement in writing techniques so that by the end of his high school career, the student should be a competent writer.

Practical forms of writing are utilized in the writing program of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Personal letters should be the equivalent of good conversation and pupils should learn this type of communication well. The writing of business letters should be mastered as well as the writing of minutes, taking notes on an article or lecture, and item-writing for newspapers. The Sequential Plan begins the writing of practical forms in the eighth grade with the writing of business letters, letters of request, order letters, and thank-you notes. By the end of the eighth grade, all the form elements of both business and personal letters should be mastered. This leaves the high school classes free to concentrate on advanced composition.
Précis writing is concentrated upon in the Silvy Kraus plan. The teacher gives each student a duplicated sheet containing various types of summary writing followed by a discussion of the distinguishing characteristics of a précis. Together the class composes a précis with suggestions for improvement being written on the board. The Sequential Plan recommends précis writing at the eleventh grade level. It should be begun early in the year so that the student may utilize it in writing in other classes as well as in literature reports and reference papers.

Theme writing is considered essential in any writing program but the approaches vary. The Kentucky Council plan advocates effective teaching of composition before—not after—a pupil writes. By anticipating problems the teacher can save the student from many errors. Students must be helped in limiting topics and must be made to realize communication involves a receiver as well as a sender. In writing a theme, the student must keep in mind the audience for which he is writing. An outline is an essential prerequisite to good theme writing and while it need not be lengthy, it must be comprehensive. Some of the theme writing should be done in class. Not only is the classroom conducive to writing but the pupil has the opportunity of receiving advice at the moment it is needed. Paragraph writing must be developed
before theme writing is attempted, with expository, narrative and descriptive paragraphs being mastered. The New England Association of English Teachers suggests two methods of improving theme writing. One calls for the distribution of mimeographed copies of a faulty theme which the students correct and compare with the theme as corrected by the teacher. The other plan calls for compositions to be written on the blackboard with the teacher leading an analysis of the work. Both plans involve considerable time so it is up to the teacher to determine whether or not the results accomplished will justify the time spent.

"Free association" themes are written in the Natural Method advocated by William H. Baker. In this type of theme the student writes what he really thinks and feels and his writing becomes a means of self-expression rather than a duty. The Sequential Program introduces writing two-paragraph themes in the ninth grade to bridge the gap between paragraph and theme writing. From the two-paragraph theme, students advance to the five-paragraph theme by the end of the ninth grade. By the end of the senior year the student should have had experience in writing explanatory themes, themes of opinion, and themes of analysis.

The value of writing a research paper in high school is controversial. Lois Grose of the Pittsburgh Public Schools feels training
should be started as early as the seventh grade so that when the student reaches college, he will not be habituated to making the errors which college teachers object to. The Sequential Plan advocates writing reference papers to teach students to synthesize information by thinking through a mass of information and producing a conclusion. A reference paper should emphasize composition rather than mechanical skills. Students in small schools are usually handicapped in writing a research paper because of the limited library facilities. However, if the teacher feels the research paper is a necessity, books may be borrowed from college and city libraries.

Since most schools have heterogenous grouping of classes, the methods presented have concentrated on this type. However, the University of Kansas plan provides for helping the poorer student through creative writing. The Grand Rapids plan is particularly recommended for classes of slower students. A series of essays about personal experiences reveals the ability, temperament, interest, and aspiration of the slow student. Using a common topic sentence the class is encouraged to write of individual experiences. The gifted student is often neglected by the teacher's concern about getting the slow pupil to write well enough to receive a passing grade. This is a mistake easily made and must be guarded against. Accelerated students should be given additional challenging assignments and
Teacher evaluation should guide, not punish. Cryptic comments without any follow-up are of no value to the student. Marginal notations and terminal comments are recommended by the Kentucky Council Plan. Strengths as well as weaknesses should be noted with the comments showing the student how his mistakes affected the purpose of his paper. Comment should be so written that it encourages self-criticism. A split grade on compositions often clarifies problems. One grade is designated for content, the other for mechanics. This plan, recommended by the University of Kansas, also suggests the teacher let the student know the good points of his composition as well as the weak points. Some comment should be made on every paper.

Anna De Armand of the University of Delaware English Department urges teachers to carefully mark all errors on themes, return them and ask the pupils to make the necessary corrections and hand in the corrected theme. Edward Gordon, moderator of a panel discussion by English teachers held at Goucher College, advises the use of asterisks in the margin to denote errors and when the students receive their papers, they go to the blackboard and write the faulty sentence. In a class discussion students determine how to improve the imperfect writing. The Sequential Plan counsels the teacher to
express appreciation for a well-written phrase. Also the teacher should be consistent in the rank of importance placed on content, organization and mechanics. Evaluation must be individualized to stimulate the interest of each pupil.
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