FFORUM
A Newsletter of the English Composition Board, University of Michigan

ECB Workshop '80

The Second Annual Workshop for Michigan Teachers of Writing

Ann Arbor
June 17, 18, 19, 20

Contents

fforum Vol. I, No. 3
Spring, 1980.

Published four times annually by
The English Composition Board,
1025 Angell Hall
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109
(313) 764-0429

Chairman: Dan Fader
Editorial Advisor: Bernard Van't Hul
Editor: Patti Stock
Editorial Assistant: Teri Adams
Research Assistant: Robert Root
Graphics: David Oliver
Compositor: Vicki Davinich

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the "In the Library" feature of the February issue of fforum, Amy Devitt contributed the material reviewing the work of Edward P. J. Corbett, and John Grove wrote about the work of Sheridan Baker and John Warriner. Since the article was not jointly composed, I apologize for the misleading joint by-line.

What is on the Schedule

WRITING WORKSHOP '80
ENGLISH COMPOSITION BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The Workshop will begin with registration from 4:30 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 June. From 6:00 p.m. Tuesday through 3:00 p.m. Friday, 20 June, our time together will be divided among three primary types of sessions: small group meetings where 20 participants will work together as a unit with an ECB faculty member for about six hours; large group meetings during which two small groups are combined to work on three occasions with three different pairs of ECB instructors; and two plenary meetings where presentations and discussions involving the entire membership take place.

Workshop '80 participants are free to enjoy the beauties of late spring in Ann Arbor on Thursday afternoon while Workshop '79 Alums meet for three consecutive seminars. If spring hasn't come, we'll all go cross-country skiing.

Tuesday evening, following the first small group meeting, the ECB will have a wine and cheese party for its Workshop '80 guests. Thursday evening, Workshop '80 participants and Workshop '79 Alums will meet together with ECB members for dinner and dancing.

Enrollment will be limited to teachers, administrators, and board members who did not attend Workshop '79 and whose schools, either individually or cooperatively, held an ECB Outreach seminar in 1978-79 or 1979-80. If you wish to attend Workshop '80, complete the attached form and send a check for $25.00 (payable to the English Composition Board) to:

Ms. Teri Adams, Workshop Coordinator
English Composition Board
1025 Angell Hall
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Detach Registration Form

- -

PLEASE REGISTER ME FOR WRITING WORKSHOP '80

Name ______________________________

Home address ______________________________

Home telephone ______________________________

School address ______________________________

School telephone ______________________________

WORKSHOP '80 ALUMNI SEMINARS
ENGLISH COMPOSITION BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

On the occasion of Workshop '80, we plan to conduct an afternoon of three seminars for the Workshop '79 Alumni to be held on Thursday, 19 June. The content of these seminars will build upon and extend your Workshop '79 experiences; the format of them will be much the same. After our working sessions, we will join Workshop '80 participants for dinner and dancing.

If you attended Workshop '79 and wish to attend the Alumni Seminars of Workshop '80, complete the attached form and send a check for $10.00 (payable to the English Composition Board) to:

Ms. Teri Adams, Workshop Coordinator
English Composition Board
1025 Angell Hall
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Your registration covers the cost of your overnight housing in Ann Arbor as well as dinner on 19 June and breakfast on 20 June.

Detach Registration Form

- -

PLEASE REGISTER ME FOR ALUMNI SEMINARS - WORKSHOP '80

Name _____

Home address _____

Home telephone _____

School address _____

School telephone _____

When at the Workshop

TUESDAY, June 17th

4:30-6:00	Registration
6:00-7:30	Dinner
7:30-9:00	First Meeting: Small Group
9:00	Wine and Cheese Party

WEDNESDAY, June 18th

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:00	First Plenary Session
10:00-10:15	Coffee Break
10:15-12:15	First Meeting: Large Group
12:30-1:45	Lunch
2:00-3:30	Second Plenary Session
3:30-3:45	Coffee Break
3:45-5:15	Second Meeting: Small Group
6:00-7:30	Dinner

THURSDAY, June 19th

7:15-8:00	Breakfast
8:00-10:00	Second Meeting: Large Group
10:00-10:15	Coffee Break
10:15-11:45	Third Meeting: Small Group
10:30-11:30	Alum '79 Registration
12:00-1:15	Lunch: Two Groups

Afternoon Free for Workshop '80 Participants
Seminars for Workshop '79 Alumni

1:30-3:00	Seminar I
3:00-3:15	Coffee Break
3:15-4:45	Seminar II
4:45-5:00	Coffee Break
5:00-6:30	Seminar III: Report on the Year
7:30-9:00	Banquet
9:00-12:00	Dance Band

FRIDAY, June 20th

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:30	Third Meeting: Large Group
10:30-10:45	Coffee Break
10:45-12:15	Fourth Meeting: Small Group
12:30-1:45	Lunch
1:45-3:00	Report

Who are the Speakers

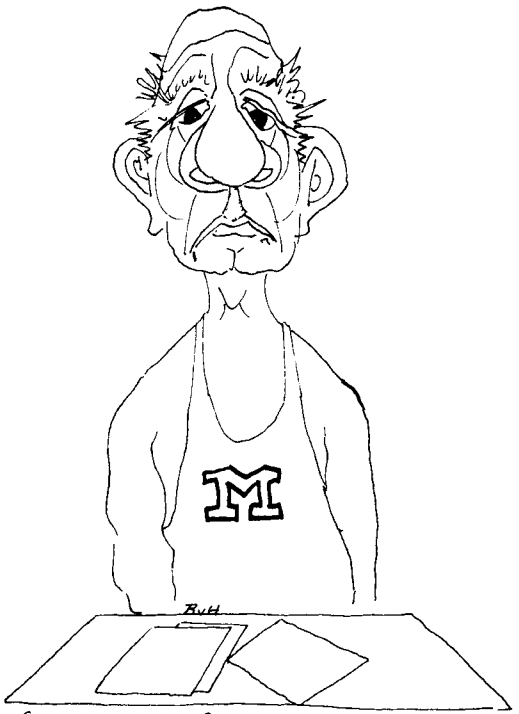
TEACHING ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

Richard W. Bailey

In the visits of ECB members to Michigan schools, teachers regularly identify **organization** as the writing skill most difficult to teach and most needed by their students. Faculty members at the University of Michigan share the opinion of their secondary school colleagues, who, in responses to an ECB survey, identified the skill of "organizing the material to be presented" as "the most important to teach."

How can teachers do a more efficient and more effective job of teaching organization? Conventional teaching methods focus on the outline, the need for a beginning, a middle, and an end to an expository essay, and the structure of the paragraph (particularly the relation of examples and illustrations to a topic sentence). Yet many teachers believe that such methods do not bring students very rapidly to a mature writing style, particularly when there is insufficient time to assign and correct essays of 400 words or longer. Many student papers have the structure of exploded paragraphs with the "topic" forming the beginning, the illustrations the body, and a brief re-statement of the topic the ending. However, more complex problems of organization are demanded at the college-level and in government, business, and industry, and students faced with such tasks often quail and flounder.

In Workshop '80, I hope to work with participants to develop strategies that address the teaching of organization. Criteria for such strategies ought to include: 1) assignments that recognize the burdens of secondary school teaching loads and the limited time available for reading and evaluating student papers; 2) assignments that will capture students' enthusiasm and enable individuals to write effectively about subjects of interest to them; and 3) assignments that enable students to gain a sense of alternative strategies for writing tasks which require different organizational patterns.



After 37 years of pitting himself against the blankness of paper, aging UM student pauses to ponder a career in government, business, or industry, where he will probably quail and flounder.

Assignments that address the problem of organization might be structured to develop four skills: **re-arrangement, completion, imitation, and composition.** These categories do not constitute a curriculum or suggest a progressive acquisition of skills; yet they do provide a useful beginning for thinking about the problem.

Re-Arrangement

Re-arrangement is a strategy sometimes used by teachers to alert students to their sense of individual paragraphs. Separate sentences (reproduced on slips of paper) are distributed and students asked to put them into an order that makes sense as a paragraph. Such tasks invite students to consider various links that join sentences: sentence adverbials (like first or therefore), general and specific words, pronominal sequence, temporal and logical patterns, and the like. Consider, for instance, the following random set of sentences:

1. Those who sit in the front row on the side seem ambivalent, as though they need the magnetic pull of a teacher.

2. Normally prompt, he usually took a seat in the front row next to the door.

3. I think that students who sit in the center, front-row are the most serious.

4. I usually worry about those who choose the back corner.

5. James came to every scheduled class in our fluorescent-lit, pre-fab classroom.

Most students will have no difficulty in arranging these sentences into the coherent paragraph from which they were taken (viz. Thomas C. Wheeler, The Great American Writing Block, p. 71).

Re-arrangement helps students to become aware of the "clues" that create unity without obliging them or their teacher to master an elaborate vocabulary of technical terms, and like other writing tasks such exercises may be assigned individually or to peer groups for discussion and completion. **Question for discussion in Workshop '80: How can the principle of re-arrangement be extended to structures beyond the paragraph?**

Completion

Completion exercises may be modeled on the pattern of the ECB writing assessent in which a pair of initial sentences provides the subject, perspective, and language to be imitated and developed by the student writer. Teachers who have participated in ECB in-service programs and workshops often report considerable success with such assignments as a supplement to more conventional "topics" or free writing. We are not at all reluctant to share with teachers the attributes of the most successful essays we receive from our entering students,

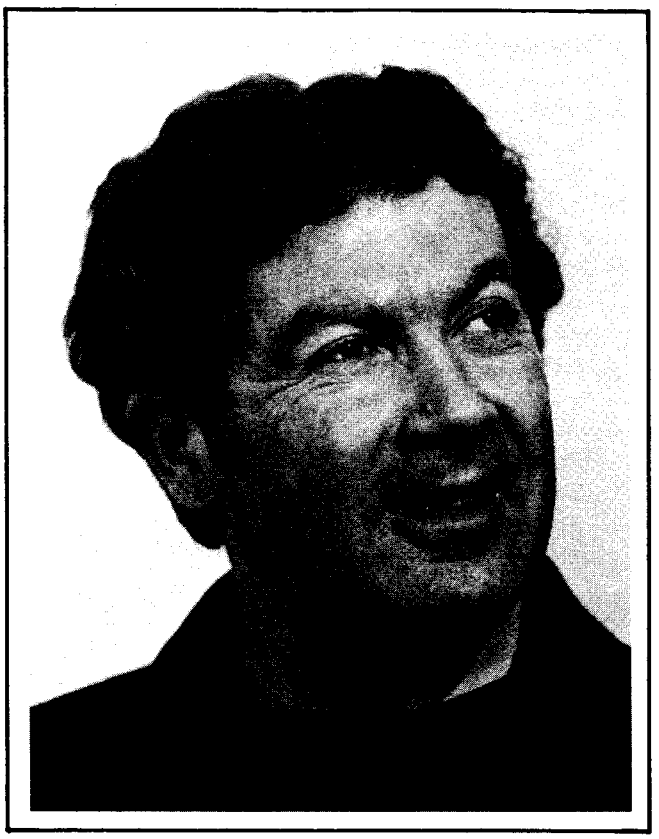
particularly when our readers share the opinion that the best writers tend to be the best organizers. **A second question for Workshop '80: How can the principles of our ECB assessment be developed into a variety of writing activities in the secondary school classroom?**

Imitation

Imitation is often implied in the hidden agenda of secondary and college classrooms. Where students may believe that they have done badly because they didn't "give the teacher what s/he wanted," teachers often think that students are attempting to explain away failure by suggesting that the assignment called for something reflecting the teacher's personal preference or idiosyncratic quirk. Some justice usually characterizes both sides of the disagreement: for the student, the agenda was hidden; for the teacher, the student failed to perform. But imitation can be made part of the open agenda of the composition class to the benefit of both teachers and students, not only through the imitation of general principles of clarity and elegance but also through the imitation of particular styles of writing. **Question for Workshop '80: How can we make imitation a recognized and valuable part of the writing curriculum?**

Composition

Composition, the last of the four skills, is the task that pits the students against the blankness of the paper. With my colleagues, I expect to assist teachers in formulating a strategy for making assignments that will be "cost-effective," ones that will justify the hard work of writing and the hard work of reading and evaluating. Our focus will be on the qualities of assignments that work best; our hope is that the principles we derive together will be amplified into a sheaf of assignments that workshop participants can make use of when they return to the classroom.



TOWARD GUARANTEEING SUCCESSFUL WRITING

Daniel N. Fader

One of our most challenging problems as teachers of composition is to identify precisely what is wrong with the bad writing we see. Then, if we succeed at that difficult task, how shall we communicate our analysis to the writer? Experience convinces us that the analytic apparatus we possess is not easily transferred into the possession of our students nor are we often able to apply it profitably to our own writing.

Because I find these dual problems particularly challenging, I will spend much of the time available to me in Workshop '80 attempting to derive and apply an editorial apparatus which, in my experience, describes all the significant acts that teachers or writers perform in their editorial work upon the writing they encounter or produce.

Editing

One example of the kind of work I expect to be doing in our Second Annual Writing Workshop is embodied in the following parallel texts. The original text **(T. I)** is composed of two sentences taken from a brief report written for administrative peers by an English teacher who is also an administrator. In my view as editor and teacher, the significant question is not whether I can rewrite the two sentences so that they are efficient and graceful. More important, can I define their faults with enough clarity to communicate editorial principles and related practices to their author?

The second text **(T. II)** is my attempt at editing the original. It is the best I can do now, but I know that it is neither the best nor only possible reworking of these two sentences. It is, however, responsive to problems that I think I can communicate unambiguously to the author in the form of the questions and answers which follow the two texts:

(T. I: 80 words)

I present this information to
you in general exposition of the
present efforts being undertaken
or projected in the area of basic
English instruction (composition
and language skills assistance/
development) under our direction
or in association with us. I
believe such information may be
useful as a base for the determi-
nation of what further efforts and
possible costs might be practica-
ble in reference to basic English
instruction efforts that could be
relevant to the student focus of
the new proposal.

(T. II: 32 words)

This information
summarizes present or projected
instruction
in
writing

that we direct
or supervise.
It may be
useful in determining

costs to this
unit of
further instruction
associated with
the new proposal.

Question I: Why does the passage seem so wordy and repetitious to me?

Answer A: In two sentences I find 20 words with more than two syllables. In rewriting, I reduce this plethora to ten because I know that the average number of such words in effective complex or compound English sentences is nearer five than 10 (note the five in this last sentence).

Answer B: The two sentences contain a total of fifteen prepositional phrases in the original text. Their effect upon the rhythm of the sentences is a periodic disaster, for their frequency induces the reader to respond to the rhythm rather than the meaning of the words. In rewriting, I reduce the number from fifteen to five, concentrating especially upon the soporific first sentence where I am able to reduce the number of prepositional phrases from eight to one.

Answer C: Nine words in the original text end with "tion." Since they are not apparently being used by the author for the emphases that can come from interior rhymes or echoes, I have reduced such words from nine to three.

Answer D: Six substantive words are repeated in the two sentences, three of them (information, instruction, English) twice and two of them (efforts, basic/-base) three times. The sixth, present, is used both as a verb and an adjective in the first sentence. In the edited version, only instruction is repeated.

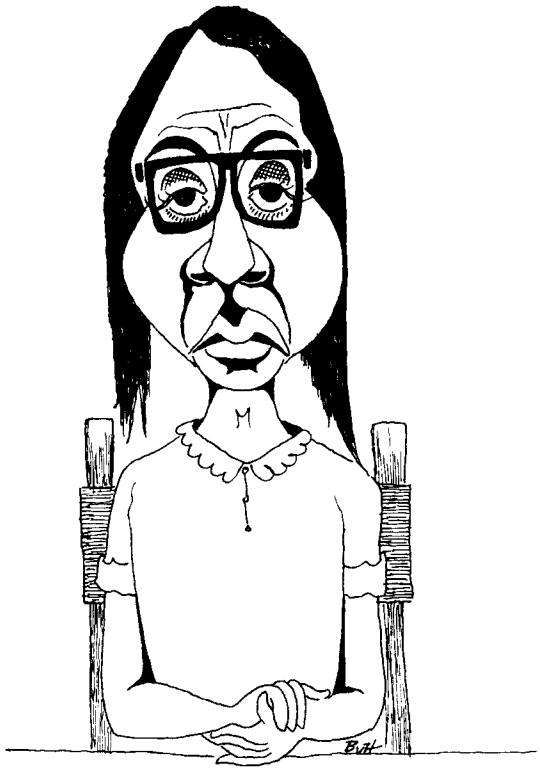
Question II: Why does the passage seem so congested to me in spite of its great length?

Answer A: Adjective-noun phrases, the heaviest syntactical blocks available to builders of sentences, are used twelve times in these two sentences; about 35% of the words in the passage are involved in such phrases. In the edited version I have reduced 12 to 3, involving about 25% of the words in the two sentences.

Answer B: Nouns are repeatedly used as adjectives throughout the passage. In the first sentence, composition and language skills assistance/development is impossibly congested, while the second sentence continues the practice with instruction efforts and student focus. All such usage is eliminated in the edited version.

Assignment Construction

The six different types of explanations encompassed in the answers to Questions I and II have proven useful to me in describing to my students, both in secondary and collegiate composition classes, the flaws in their writing and



Freshman woman dormitory student essay writer ponders communication skills instructor's classroom lecture on noun-use avoidance strategies in acute-anxiety stages of non-peer-group cost-effective type writing assignment situations

the remedies available to them. However, I have often been aware that their poor writing has been in part provoked by the poor assignments I have made. Because I am conscious of the near relationship between the quality of assignments and the quality of writing they elicit, I shall also spend some time during Workshop '80 discussing the making of assignments. For example, I believe that ETS writing assignments which ask high school juniors and seniors to write for twenty minutes on such topics as "We have met the enemy and he is us" are travesties of what we know about obtaining representative writing from our students.

Such an assignment fails to make use of itself to promote a sense of familiar ease and competence in the writer. Furthermore, it fails so completely to identify an audience for the assignment that definition of audience becomes--improperly, in my opinion, considering the occasion and purpose of the assignment--a part of the writer's problem of composition. Both of these failures happen frequently in assignments intended to provoke copious, competent writing, and both are good reasons why bad writing occurs as a result of such assignments.

Peer Grouping

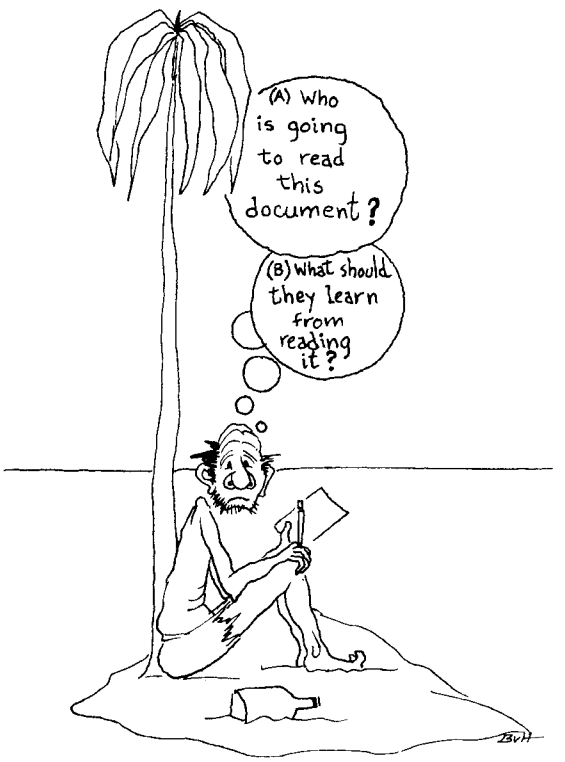
In addition to giving attention to problems of editing and making assignments, I shall attempt to describe and model the employment of peer groups in the teaching of writing. Because the use of such groups can help to resolve problems as various as plagiarism and class size, I will often make them the context for much of my discussion of editing and of creating assignments.

Last year fifteen English teachers from a junior and senior high school in the same district spent forty hours in an ECB-related seminar on the teaching of writing. One of the joint products of the five sets of three teachers who worked together during the seminar was a list of fourteen guidelines for the use of peer grouping in secondary schools. In the opinion of these teachers, "peer grouping is based upon two human needs that are both social and linguistic: the need for an interested audience and the need for peer models." To support "successful peer grouping in their classes," according to the fifteen teachers reporting on their own experience, instructors must realize that "early and repeated success is crucial to the group's progress. Initial assignments should be designed to guarantee that success." During the course of Workshop '80, I shall try to place the processes of editing, assignment making, and peer grouping into a pattern for the teaching of composition that goes some way toward a guarantee of successful writing.

MODELS MAKE WRITING TASKS EASIER

Barbra S. Morris

Experienced writers have learned to ask themselves questions about their writing that are determined by the familiarity and complexity of the task ahead. **Such questions as these are customary: (A) Who is going to read this document? (B) What should they learn from reading it? (C) How must the information be presented to achieve the results I want?**



INEXPERIENCED WRITER HAVING DIFFICULTY IN UNFAMILIAR WRITING SITUATION

Perhaps all three questions apply to a writing task, perhaps only one; their application is determined by the writer's purpose. For instance, in compiling a family grocery list, categories (A) and (C) generally don't need any attention at all, but when category (B) is incomplete, there will be immediate complaints. By contrast, if the same person writes a proposal to obtain funding for a project, serious inquiry into all three categories becomes essential. A writer with such a

task is likely to obtain copies of previously funded proposals to use as a model for appropriate format and language. Experienced writers invariably learn from the successes and failures of others and themselves. Because inexperienced writers lack practice asking or answering qustions which guide different composing processes, they often cannot define or master unfamiliar writing situations.

The Value of Models

As teachers of writing we need to help students experiment within many sorts of rhetorical contraints. Such experiments with writing are not threatening when a model or framework is supplied and the writer is free to compose within it; the best models, therefore, encourage two very different behaviors: imitation and invention. The writer imitates a form and invents an original text.

Newspapers are a good source of various rhetorical models: editorials, sports reports, letters to the editor, obituaries, advertisements. Television is another familiar, accessible form of communication that students can imitate. For example, with free rein to invent their own products and with straightforward direction to work from, two students together write and present a commercial to the class. The following model for writing a commercial supplies a clear explanation of the rhetorical purposes of television dialogue:

Steps to a Convincing Television Commercial

1. Make clear what the merchandise is and does.
2. Persuade through visual demonstration of the product in use.
3. Appeal to a basic desire and link it to the product.
4. List the benefits of the item and the arguments for buying it.
5. Provide interest for both eye and ear.
6. Use a maximum of action with a minimum of words.

In preparing a television commercial using two people, employ the device of the **proxy question.** First, identify the information you want to give the viewer, then ask a question that requires the desired explanation. The better you can disguise the fact that you are using a proxy question to give information to your viewers, the more acceptable it will be to them. Proxy questions can be perfectly disguised by the script. For instance, when one character is being interviewed for a job by the other one, a great deal of information can be made clear to the viewer without detailed explanations seeming to be contrived and awkward. The viewer believes that the circumstances of the interview necessitate the facts coming to light.

Characters in a television commercial must sound like real people, and yet they cannot talk the way real people talk. This is a contradiction resolved by the viewer himself. Although the speech the viewer hears is not the same as everyday speech, he earnestly wants recognizable clues as to the common function and role of the people he sees on the screen. These clues, or props as I call them, are readily accepted by an audience, for they complete the image. Equally important--the information they give must be reinforced by the words of the person talking. Thus, in the very act of speaking unlike real people, the characters supply the viewer with information props which create dimension, history, and intention. The sense of reality gained in this simultaneous process is so much greater than the viewers' sense of unreality in the conversation that the illusion is expanded rather than diminished. A triangle of association is established between speakers and props for the viewer.

Putting this to the actual test, imagine two men engaged in this actual conversation:

1st MAN: Will you be able to meet me?

2nd MAN: Yes...I think so.

1st MAN: What time will you be through?

2nd MAN: Oh, about five.

1st MAN: Well...we can meet at the regular place.

2nd MAN: Sure.

Not a great deal can be made of this conversation because it does not take into account a dialogue triangle between speakers and props. With so little time at his disposal, the television writer can't make use of such relatively empty dialogue. Here is the same dialogue with the props added:

1st MAN: Will you be able to meet me?

2nd MAN: I think so. I've only one operation this afternoon.

1st MAN: Glad to see you're taking it easier. What time will you be through?

2nd MAN: If everything goes well, about five. I'm planning to relax this weekend, and drive my new Electrocar north for some skiing.

1st MAN: Sounds great. I'll pick up Doris and we can meet you in front of the hospital. We'll split the cost.

2nd MAN: Fine! I can use this weekend in the country. And it won't cost us anything for gas. We just charge the battery.

The viewer now knows a great deal. One of the men is a doctor who works very hard, and his friend--who knows him well--is aware of this. The first man sounds as if he is married, for he mentions a woman named Doris. They will drive to the country, we may assume, for relaxation in a beautiful setting. The doctor is the happy owner of a new money-saving Electrocar; the consumer in the audience is being influenced to imitate the buyer. The original dialogue merely tells the viewer that the men have a place to meet, but there is no reason for a viewer to identify that place with an object anyone would like to own. The second version creates important associations. Of course, the picture the television viewer sees reinforces the belief that owning this car to vacation in would be pleasurable.

From Speech to Writing

Assignments like this allow students to begin from ordinary conversation and then adapt such speech to writing for a defined purpose. The assignment encourages invention while its dimension of playfulness reduces students' self-consciousness about trying a new kind of composition. When the audience is the entire class, student writers inevitably engage in a livelier process of inquiry about the product to be sold and the method of its presentation than they would for the teacher alone. The classroom provides the forum for analysis of types of writing people encounter as listeners, readers, and writers. Varying the emphasis and requirements of assignments brings different linguistic and rhetorical conditions to students' attention; expanding the audience for writers' ideas demonstrates how language is responded to in a world of different perceptions.

During Workshop '80 I plan to examine the design of several kinds of writing tasks, including assignments which students can produce and talk about collaboratively.

A RHETORICAL CONCEPTION OF WRITING

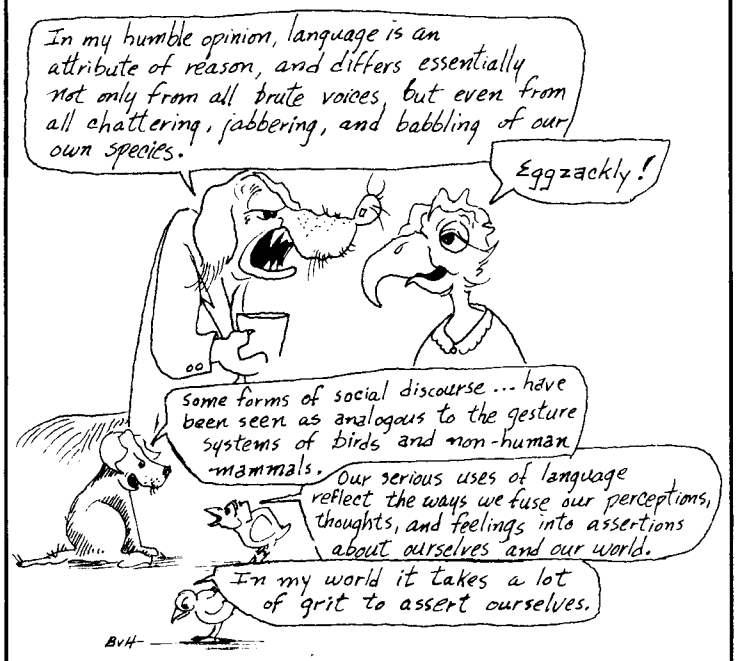
Jay L. Robinson

Thought and language are so closely interrelated that many theorists have considered language as nothing other and no less than the external realization of thought. Although some forms of social discourse--greetings, cocktail party chit chat--have been seen as more closely analogous to the gesture systems of birds and non-human mammals than to processes of human conceptualization, our more serious uses of language are taken to reflect the ways our minds organize the world into conceptual categories and the ways we fuse our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings into assertions about ourselves and our world.

Traditional grammar, and the schoolroom tradition based on it, assumed almost an identity between thought and language. Goold Brown, an influential grammarian of the 19th century and a New England Quaker schoolmaster, defined language this way: "...language is an attribute of reason, and differs essentially not only from all brute voices, but even from all the chattering, jabbering, and babbling of our own species, in which there is not an intelligible meaning, with division of thought, and distinction of words."

When Goold Brown and other traditional grammarians speak of language in this way, they have in mind writing, not speech: speech, except in its carefully planned uses for argumentation and oratory, is too ephemeral to be taken seriously--too like, in its everyday uses, chattering, jabbering, babbling. Modern theorists are less quick to dismiss speech, or to see it as something utterly different from writing; and they are more cautious in asserting an identity between thought and language--certainly between language and reason. Yet modern theorists still see closer relations between thinking and writing than between thinking and speaking. Lev Vygotsky, the Russian cognitive psychologist, views writing as the expression of what he calls "inner speech": a language-like and language derived system

of generalized concepts and relationships that permits a human being to make expressible sense of his world. Writing, for Vygotsky, is the act of making inner speech intelligible and communicable to others by converting it from private to public forms.



What do these abstractions have to do with the practical work of the composition teacher?

The Traditional Conception

Two differing pedagogies have emerged in response to traditional and more modern conceptions of the relation between thinking and writing. Traditionalists customarily focus their attention on the written language students have produced, or on the linguistic forms they want students to produce. They mark errors in student papers and have students correct them; they use a variety of linguistic drills (sentence combining, for example) to encourage fluency, accuracy, and maturity of expression; the more tradition-bound of them even teach grammar, or those portions of grammar that treat "division of thought"--subjects, predicates, and sentence types--and "distinction of words"--parts of speech. The assumption motivating such work, though not always recognized, is that careful, conscious attention to expression of thought will lead inevitably to clearer thinking: to sharpen language is to sharpen thought.

The Modern Conception

The alternative pedagogy focuses on the processes of thinking themselves, and is founded on the assumption that students will write more effectively as they can be helped to think more clearly. Teachers who make this assumption emphasize pre-writing activities, things done before a student puts pen to paper. These activities include reading or viewing and class or small-group discussion of stimulating materials; study of logical strategies and fallacies; free writing, brainstorming, and other stimuli to invention; exercises in perceptual acuity. Inventionists would agree with this assertion: to sharpen thought is to sharpen language.

The Rhetorical Conception

There is yet a third general approach to the teaching of composition now attracting more followers--an approach that might be termed "rhetorical." As the name suggests, this pedagogy has ties with a rich traadition which originated in classical Greece and held currency in the West until the 19th century. But the new approach has been much influenced by current findings in psychology, in linguistics and sociolinguistics, and in philosophy.

The rhetorical approach acknowledges that a relationship exists between thought and language, thinking and writing, but focuses on neither. Instead, its center of concern is the communicative act itself. Its intent is to identify the participants in the act and the factors that influence it, then to explain the relation of these participants and factors as they give shape to a final written product. Teachers who employ this approach assume that students have language, that they can think, and that they can use language to express their

thoughts if they can be helped to see clearly their purpose in writing, their stance or relation to the topic they are addressing, the special demands imposed by the medium they are using, and the particular needs of their audience. The argument for a rhetorical approach might be put in this oversimplified way: Students use language in purposeful ways every day of their lives to make meaning of their world, to communicate and cooperate with others; they are familiar with the rhetorical demands of everyday life. A canny teacher can make use of what students already know about their language and its uses. But writing, and the uses of writing for academic or professional purposes, imposes new demands that differ from those of everyday interaction through language. Written texts have their own conventions of organization and style; a writer stands in a more removed relation to his topic than does a speaker; the writer's audience must be imagined and its needs projected (nobody questions or talks back to a writer). New rhetoricians claim that students will write better as they come to understand the nature of the communicative acts they engage in; that students will write better if they are given purposeful tasks and real audiences to write to.

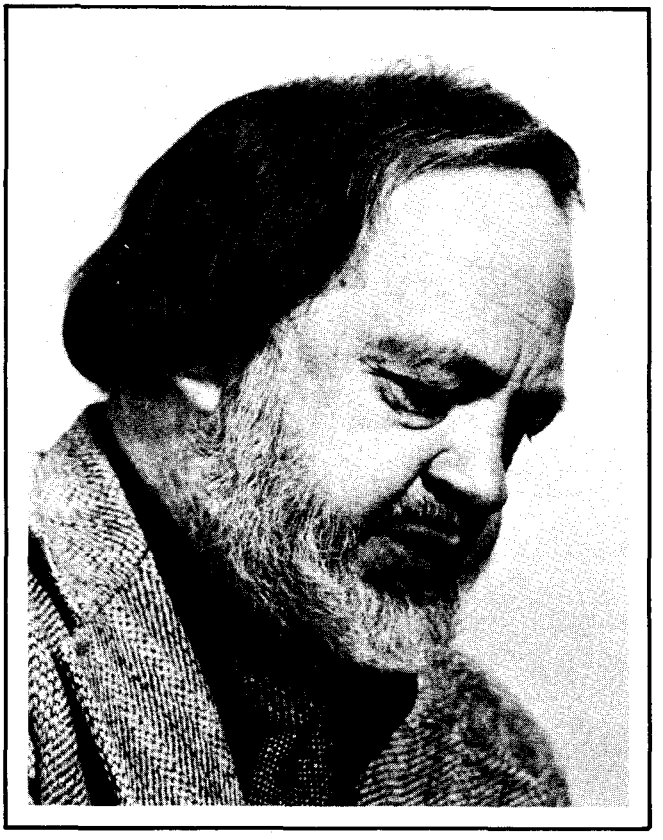
What do these brief synopses have to do with my work in Workshop '80?

Let me offer two contentious contentions, and then a qualification (a familiar rhetorical strategy for an academic). **Contention one:** Most of us who teach composition have failed to acknowledge that writing is an exceedingly complex act; or failure to recognize its complexity has hampered our efforts to help students. **Contention two:** We have not often questioned the validity of our methods for teaching composition by measuring them against a set of coherent and self-consistent assumptions about what the act of writing is and how the ability to perform that act develops. **The qualification is this:** There is no single, universally accepted theory that explains the act of writing nor is there such a theory that explains how the ability to write develops. As a result, our methods must be eclectic, and one test of their validity must be whether or not they work. But our methods must not be ungrounded: they must be tested against the best statements we can make about what writing is and how it is learned.

The Writing Process

I will begin my work in Workshop '80 by attempting to develop, with help from the participants, a detailed description of what might be called "the writing process." We will try to identify the necessary steps or stages in the process by specifying the variety of conceptual, rhetorical, and linguistic problems that writers must solve in order to produce an effective piece of writing. With such a framework in mind, we will then consider and evaluate several widely used methods and techniques for teaching writing which exemplify the three general approaches described above. Because we will be working together in a small group for several hours, we will be able to choose what we look at on the basis of the interests and needs of the participants We will have time to make what is abstract in this statement, concrete with reference to application.

I look forward to working with you in Workshop '80.



WHO SHOULD TEACH WRITING... AND WHY...AND HOW

Bernard Van't Hul

While visiting Michigan schools during the past eighteen months, I gleaned facts and formed judgments which figure in my plans for Workshop '80. In the paragraphs that follow, I will specify certain of these facts and related judgments; then I will describe my Workshop plans:

Some Facts and Judgments

In most schools, as in most colleges, the teaching of writing has been assigned almost exclusively to teachers of English. Few teachers of courses other than English require much writing of their students; of those few, still fewer teach writing in their classes. Most teachers of English are uneasy with the assumption that they can teach writing when they alone are required to do so; yet we have acquiesced for decades to the curricular effects of that assumption.

In most schools, teachers of English are daunted if not overwhelmed by the sheer number of students for whose writing they are considered responsible. Without considerable help from teachers in other disciplines and with a hundred and fifty students in their daily classes, even the most energetic and imaginative English teachers are doomed to modest success as teachers of writing.

In most schools and colleges, the English curriculum is chiefly literary. In much assigned writing, students respond to works of poetry, prose fiction, or drama. I believe that the study of literature is invaluable--and that it should keep its place in English curricula. I also believe, however, that students should be practiced in writing of several non-literary kinds. (In an ideal curriculum, they would get such practice in virtually all courses. Meanwhile, in the real curriculum, they get such practice in English courses or not at all.)

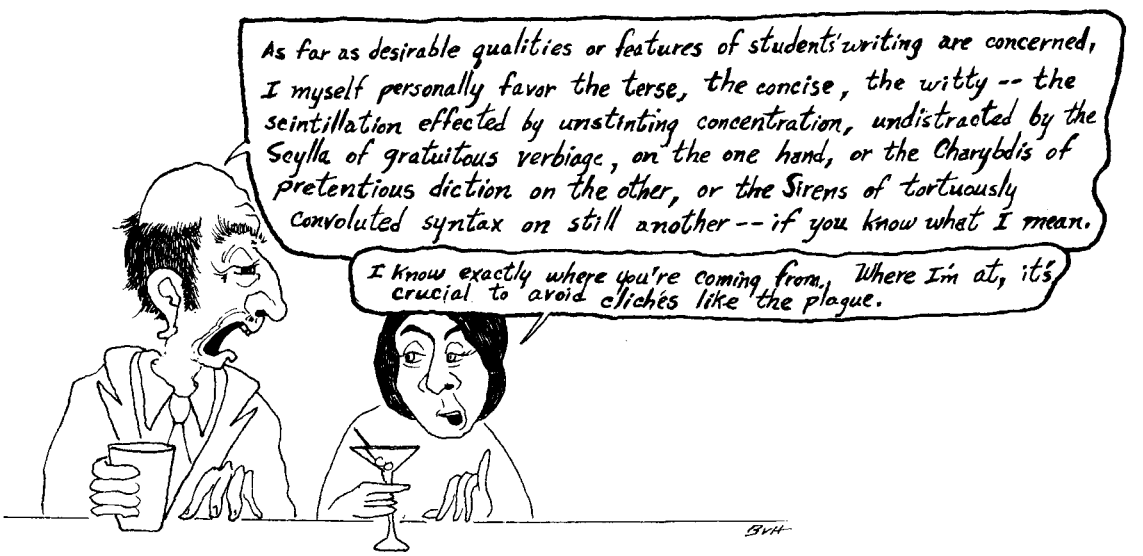
Whatever their disciplines, and whether or not they teach writing, teachers have a common set of ideals for the best writing that their students can do. In dozens of schools and colleges, a colleague and I made this simple request of hundreds of teachers of all subjects: "Whether or not you are yourself a teacher of writing, please list five or six of the qualities or features that you are most gratified to see in students' writing." In making this request, we asked teachers to set down their responses hastily and independently--"from the top of your heads and before conversing with your neighbors." And we asked them to list the desirable qualities or features with no concern for either the relative importance or the teachability of them. We then collected the responses of each group of teachers and transcribed them on a board for all to see.

It is not a pious hunch but a demonstrated fact: From teachers of all subjects--and from administrators and visiting board members too--the master list of gratifying features or qualities is finite, and remarkably the same from one school and college to another. Teachers of writing and designers of curricula are <u>not</u> agreed, however, in their answers to related, more complicated pedagogical questions, such as these: Of the gratifying features or qualities of students' writing, which are more and less <u>desirable</u>? Which are more and less <u>teachable</u>? Of those that are teachable, which are to be taught directly, explicitly--as so many units of assigned work? When in the student's career, and in what sequence? Of those that are less teachable, which should we try most to foster--and how?

My Plans for Workshop '80

In Workshop '80, I will explore briefly with participants their sense of (1) the likelihood that some of their colleagues could be persuaded to teach writing in their non-English courses, and (2) ways in which such colleagues might be identified and encouraged to cooperate in plans for school-wide teaching of literacy.

I will seek participants' answers to the complicated pedagogical questions that emerge from the consensus that I found in the schools. In this effort I anticipate no facile unanimity. The idea is not to achieve a tidy orthodoxy of theory or method, but to explore connections between a given theory and preferred classroom practices. Here it may be useful to invoke Jay Robinson's **traditionalist**, **inventionist**, and **rhetorical** "approaches"--as hypotheses with which to account for the most dramatic of differences among participants' answers to those complicated pedagogical questions.



I will give most of my Workshop attention to the making of assignments and to the evaluation of students' writing in response to them. As a preliminary step, I will send the following request, long before the Workshop, to participants with whom I will work:

> Please identify one "interesting piece of prose" (not much longer than two pages) written by one of your students recently. Bring with you an unmarked, type-written transcript of that piece (double spaced, the lines numbered in the left margin, and accurate to the jot and the tittle of every spelling and all punctuation). An unusually problem-fraught piece may be as useful to our group as an unusually problem-free one.
>
> Introduce the transcript with a brief, single-spaced description of the assignment, in its context, that occasioned the piece. Explain, if it is relevant, the classroom discussion or textbook work that brought you to making the assignment. Briefly characterize the writer.
>
> Do not identify the writer--OR yourself OR your school or college.
>
> Please bring thirty copies of your transcript to the Workshop. I will collect all sets of copies when you arrive; and each of us will have the entire anthology of transcripts as we attend closely to a handful.

Sample Introduction

In my _____ we had been
(name of course)
[discussing / reading / working on] _____. I
(topic, book, etc.)
made the assignment [orally / in writing], as follows: "Write...[etc.] Due Wednesday."

The author of this piece is in the
_____ grade.
a typical
S/he is [an unusually successful / an unusually unsuccessful]

and/but [unmotivated / highly motivated] writer. To me the paper is interesting because...

In discussing the making of assignments and evaluating of students' responses to them, I will try to demonstrate the importance of clarifying for students the criteria that vary from one kind of writing to another; and I will try to show how the effectiveness of any kind of writing varies according to the audience for whom, the purposes for which, and the situation in which it is written.

A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO WRITING THE PERSUASIVE PAPER

Frances B. Zorn

High school teachers of English and members of the English Composition Board share common concerns about writing. Among these are their students' ability to organize written work and present well-developed ideas that support a paper's thesis. We all look for ways to inspire students who claim they have nothing to say about a particular topic or have difficulty understanding an assignment.

In our Writing Workshop at the university we have found that sixteen percent of the instruction directly involves organization while nine percent responds to requests for help in understanding assignments. Practice in focusing introductions and writing useful conclusions consumes eight percent of instructional effort while student need for aid in developing ideas and providing appropriate examples and details uses an additional eight percent.

These requests for help came from 572 students who made 1,131 visits to the Workshop in the fall term 1979. Very few of these students came to us for help that would make good writers of them. Almost all came because they had persuasive evidence of their own inadequacy and simply wanted to become survivors in their college work. I intend to devote much of my time in the June Workshop to sharing techniques we have developed in tutorial classes and in the Writing Workshop for making survivors of these students. The classroom activity I describe in this issue of fforum is an example of the kind of work I will be doing with conference participants.

The exercise is designed to help students write a persuasive paper on an assigned topic; in particular, I will be addressing the problem of those students who "don't have anything to say." The discussions, pre-writing, and writing for this assignment all take place in the classroom and require several class days to complete. Because the exercise allows

the classroom supervision of writing activities, the teacher does not take home pre-writing lists to examine, thesis statements to evaluate, and rough drafts to correct.

The Assignment

The assignment is based on a short newspaper article that provides statistics and quotations from authorities on a familiar topic "Bottle Law Still Debated As Anniversary Looms." (Ann Arbor News, Dec. 1, 1979) If you have facilities to duplicate the article (which I am including for your consideration), students can refer to it when writing; if duplication is difficult, you can read the article aloud and ask your students to list the positive and negative arguments. If you decide to read the article and have them take notes, you will provide several learning activities: students will have to listen carefully, select important arguments, and record arguments and statistics accurately.

Identifying the Arguments

Individual students should copy their lists of main arguments on the blackboard under **pro** and **con** headings. You can see what they selected as important and how accurately they transcribed the ideas and statistics. By having the arguments written on the board, you and the students can make sure that all the arguments included in the article are listed.

The teacher can then call for personal experiences or special knowledge that supports the **pro** and **con** positions. Students can write all new ideas in the appropriate columns on the blackboard. When I used this exercise, one of my more vocal students had very strong feelings about the Michigan Bottle Bill. The experiences he shared made everyone aware of issues they had not previously considered:

Mike had worked in a small downtown grocery store that also sold beer and wine. Local clientele frequently tried to return containers that had obviously

UM STUDENT IN PRE-WRITING STAGE OF STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT MICHIGAN BOTTLE BILL.

not come from the store. If Mike refused to accept the containers, he faced angry people who were sometimes drunk. When customers had legitimate containers to return, they often did not clean them first and refused to turn them in at the back of the store. Mike frequently had to leave the cash register unattended to take the bottles to the storeroom. Because of dirty containers, the storeroom soon became an unpleasant place to go. Mike also told us about the problem of delivery men: since empty containers take space on trucks, less space is available for products being delivered.

Mike's comments reminded others of their experiences. One student pointed out that after the U of M - Ohio State game, the Ohio State side of the stadium was filled with litter. U of M fans, however, kept their containers or left them for young people who stayed after the game to earn some extra money collecting empties.

Focusing the Writing

Lists on the board should be lengthy after members of the class have shared their experiences. At this time students should pause to think carefully about the issues before writing one sentence that

represents the position they feel most comfortable supporting. Since students are then committed to one clearly stated point of view, they should not be confused about the focus of their writing. To sharpen that focus further the teacher should next invite students to determine their audience: are they writing to their peers? to their parents and other adults of similar beliefs? or to politicians who represent their interests in the legislature?

Before any extensive writing activity takes place, students should be asked to determine if terms need to be defined and if definitions can be found in the article. If not, students must decide whether dictionary definitions will be adequate. Another useful pre-writing practice is for students to evaluate the strengths and merits of arguments listed on the blackboard. This evaluation process can occur first in small groups and then expand to class discussion. The previous opportunity to share personal experiences should give added meaning to the arguments. In addition, the teacher should try to elicit comments on results of the proposed actions.

Arrangement

After discussion of the arguments and their implications, students should list three or four of the strongest arguments under their position statement. They should also re-evaluate their chosen position to be sure they have selected the position they want to argue.

Student questions about how to quote from an article and how to interpret and use statistics to support a position can be addressed at this time. The following sentence offers an opportunity for discussion: "It [Michigan United Conservation Club] has charged that price increases on beer and soft drinks of up to 25 percent since the law took effect are 'politically motivated.'" This fact could be used by students calling for repeal: a 25 percent price increase is too great for customers to pay. People favoring the bill could emphasize the "politically motivated" aspect and argue that the increase can be traced to refundable deposits. The teacher can also present information on how to paraphrase and quote material, pointing out when paraphrase or quotation are most effective. The exercise also provides an excellent opportunity to discuss plagiarism and how to cite references.

Writing the Paper

Individually or in small groups, students can begin to write one paragraph in support of one argument. Their first attempts at writing a paragraph can be shared in small groups. The teacher can move from group to group checking for development and correct use of quotations and statistics. When they have successfully completed one paragraph, students should move on to their next argument. Small group sessions to evaluate paragraphs as they are written will enable the teacher to monitor the writing in progress.

After each student has written several well-developed paragraphs in support of a chosen position, the teacher can discuss strategies for effective ordering of arguments in a persuasive essay. Then students can reorder the paragraphs they have written.

The work so far has not taken into consideration an introduction or conclusion. Once the arguments are developed and ordered, the body of the paper is complete. The original position statement will appear in the introductory paragraph. A discussion of strategies for introductions is appropriate at this time. Perhaps one of the quotations in the article can be used to help provide information leading to the thesis statement. The earlier discussion on the implications of the arguments should provide ideas for the conclusion.

Each student's draft will consist of three or four paragraphs supporting a position, plus an introduction and a conclusion. Class time can be scheduled for writing the final paper or students

can write the final version at home. Since teacher and students have worked closely together on the process of writing, the amount of time needed to evaluate the finished product should not be great. One rewarding strategy that can be followed after the papers have been submitted is to have papers that favor one position read and commented on by writers who adopted the opposite point of view.

This classroom exercise is one that allows a fair amount of thinking and pre-writing to take place in the classroom where the teacher is available to the students. Class discussion improves student understanding of the topic and provides an opportunity to explore personal experiences. Because of its variety of activities, this exercise affords teachers the satisfying experience of guiding their students through the writing process to a final product.

Bottle law still debated as anniversary looms

A² News Dec. 1, 1979 p.A-7

By Robert A. Novosad
NEWS LANSING BUREAU

LANSING — Michigan's controversial "bottle law" marks its one-year anniversary Monday, entering a period which may determine whether other states pass similar deposit laws in the future.

Opponents and supporters of the law here agree that the "Michigan experience" — particularly with soaring beverage prices — may dictate whether the push for mandatory deposit legislation has reached a dead-end.

If the recent rejection in Ohio of a similar deposit issue is any indication, Michigan could earn the dubious distinction of being the last state to pass a "bottle bill."

"I don't think we have reached that point yet," said Rick Jameson, special projects coordinator for the Michigan United Conservation Clubs.

"I still see a national debate over deposit laws. Unfortunately, some companies are making Michigan citizens pay the price of that battle."

MUCC is the 110,000-member sportsmen's coalition which was the prime mover behind the state's deposit law. It has charged that price increases on beer and soft drinks of up to 25 percent since the law took effect are "politically motivated."

Brewers and soft-drink bottlers, however, vehemently deny the charge. They insist the higher prices are justified by increased operating costs.

Edward Deeb, executive director of the Associated Food Dealers and an outspoken critic of the deposit law, said Michigan consumers will pay at least $300 million annually in higher prices because of the "bottle bill."

"That is solely for additional labor and handling costs," Deeb said. "It does not touch the $180 million the (beverage) industry had to invest in capital outlays to gear up for the law."

He said the additional handling costs — mainly for the clerks and stockroom workers hired by retailers, the drivers hired by distributors and the washers and handlers added by bottlers and brewers — accounts for at least $1-per-case of the higher beverage costs.

"It's a hell of an expensive way to control litter," Deeb lamented.

A promise that the "bottle bill" would clean up litter is the bandwagon which carried the law to a sweeping victory in Michigan. So far, the pledge appears to have been fulfilled.

Surveys conducted by the Department of State Highways and Transportation show that beverage-container litter has been reduced by an impressive 82 percent along most roads, while the amount of total litter is down 32 percent.

Significantly, 69 percent of the beverage containers found along roads in the surveys were from other states, or were "leftovers" from the pre-deposit era.

A special legislative committee headed by Sen. Stephen V. Monsma, D-Grand Rapids, has found that the "bottle bill" has done more than just reduce litter in its first year.

According to Monsma's committee, the law has encouraged the recycling of almost all beverage containers, reduced solid waste by 6 percent and created more jobs.

"Public support for the deposit law appears to be very strong," the committee concluded.

While Michigan residents appear to love their "bottle bill," the idea is having a hard time catching on in other states.

Voters in Ohio in early November defeated a similar proposal by an overwhelming 3-to-1 margain. Backers of the deposit issue there said the "Michigan experience" with high beverage prices was the key to the lopsided defeat.

Linda James, of the Ohio Alliance for Returnables, said anti-"bottle bill" forces there "talked a lot" about the high prices in Michigan.

"No one wants to pay more money in a time of spiraling inflation," she said. "They raised an incredible amount of money to spread their message and we didn't have the funds to match their campaign."

Jameson of MUCC said there was another reason beyond the fear of high prices for why Ohioans trounced the proposal.

"They just don't have as strong a conservation ethic as we do," he said. "I think that is fairly evident."

If the recent rejection in Ohio of a similar deposit issue is any indication, Michigan could earn the dubious distinction of being the last state to pass a "bottle bill."

Swap-Shop

At the final Plenary Session of Workshop '79, teachers indicated in summary reports that they especially valued the materials they received which they would be able to use in their classrooms. As we designed Workshop '80, we remembered those reports and planned a participants' **Swap-Shop**--a place where you and your colleagues will have the opportunity to share your favorite lesson plans and materials with one another.

To participate in the **Swap-Shop**:

1. Prepare a lesson plan, following the model of the "ECB FreeB" which you find in each issue of fforum. (The "ECB FreeB" included in this fforum was submitted by a teacher who attended Workshop '79.) Include your name and address on each page of your material. If someone uses your material, she might want to let you know of her success with it. Perhaps in this way we can establish a professional sharing system throughout the state.

2. Duplicate 125 copies of your "FreeB" and leave it in the designated box at registration. Please have your "FreeB" carefully identified with your name and school and bundle it in a large envelope. It will also be helpful if you indicate on your envelope the grade levels for which the "FreeB" is appropriate.

3. Help yourself to any and all materials of interest to you at the **Swap-Shop**.

ECB FreeB

Student essay revisions frequently amount to little more than proofreading because beginning writers lack a concrete sense of effective writing. They do not recognize what changes improve their prose style. This lesson focuses students' attention on active and static verb usage by requiring them to substitute active verbs for "to be" verbs when their purpose is to describe a scene dramatically.

Goal:

To help students revise the language of a rough draft so as to produce more vigorous writing. Specifically, to eliminate static verb constructions--the "My brother is nice" equation form of sentence.

Materials:

My students first encounter this lesson when they have a rough draft of a descriptive essay in their journals. This is lesson two: revising the rough draft.

Procedure:

1. List the forms of the verb "to be" on the board: am, is, are, was, were, been, being.

2. Ask the students to select a paragraph and determine how many of its sentences rest on "to be" verbs. (The percentages in my classes range from 75%-100%.)

3. Ask the students to alter these sentences by employing subordination, shifting predicate nominatives to subjects, and substituting dynamic for static verbs.

The revised piece of writing printed here represents approximately thirty-five minutes of classroom work on the rough draft. The student made significant progress toward eliminating static diction. The underlined forms of the verb "to be" in each draft illustrate the student's success in revising to include more active verb forms.

Rough Draft:

The kitchen, what a joke. It <u>was</u> a disaster. There <u>was</u> so much junk on the counter that you couldn't even tell what color it <u>was</u>. There <u>were</u> empty bottles everywhere. I even found one in the freezer. On the table there <u>were</u> pieces of cake, and pizza, half eaten and broken pretzels in them. The floor <u>was</u> the worst. There <u>was</u> spilt pop and spilt beer everywhere on it, pieces of pizza and cake which had been stepped on, on it, and worst of all a couple of broken eggs in the corner.

Revised Version:

The kitchen looked like World War II had just ended in it. So much junk had piled up on the counter through the evening that I couldn't even tell what color it <u>was</u>. There <u>were</u> empty bottles everywere; I even found one in the freezer. Pieces of half-eaten cake and pizza with broken pretzels in them covered the table. The floor <u>was</u> the worst. Pop and beer spilled across it; pieces of pizza and cake smeared across it; and, worst of all, two broken eggs perched in the corner.

Note:

My students readily perceive the vigor and sophistication of their revised work. Offering them a concrete goal clarifies the revision process for them. I owe inspiration for this lesson to a paragraph on "Overworked Verbs" in Michael E. Adelstein and Jean G. Pival, <u>The Writing Commitment</u>. N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976.

Note (from Sue Frazier, Pioneer High School English Department, Ann Arbor, MI 48103):

If you adapt this lesson or parts for your use, will you please let me know of your successes or frustrations?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In an earlier edition of fforum I wrote about tentative plans of the Michigan Department of Education to require course work in reading of prospective elementary and secondary school teachers, and I described the efforts of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English to have "reading" changed to "communication skills" or a similar term that would include writing.

I regret to report that the MCTE recommendation was ignored and the State Board of Education approved a reading-only requirement in December. Despite holding public hearings (which no member of the Board actually attended), the Board chose to ignore contemporary research findings in the teaching of English and the advice of such organizations as the National Council of Teachers and the Michigan Speech Association.

There is still one last opportunity those interested will have to influence the certification code revision. The Board proposal must be approved by the state legislature. Those who believe that writing is as important as reading in the certification of teachers should write to Senator Jack Faxon, Chair, Senate Education Committee, Lansing, Michigan.

Stephen N. Judy

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
Paid
Ann Arbor MI
Permit 144

FFORUM
English Composition Board
1025 Angell Hall
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI. 48109