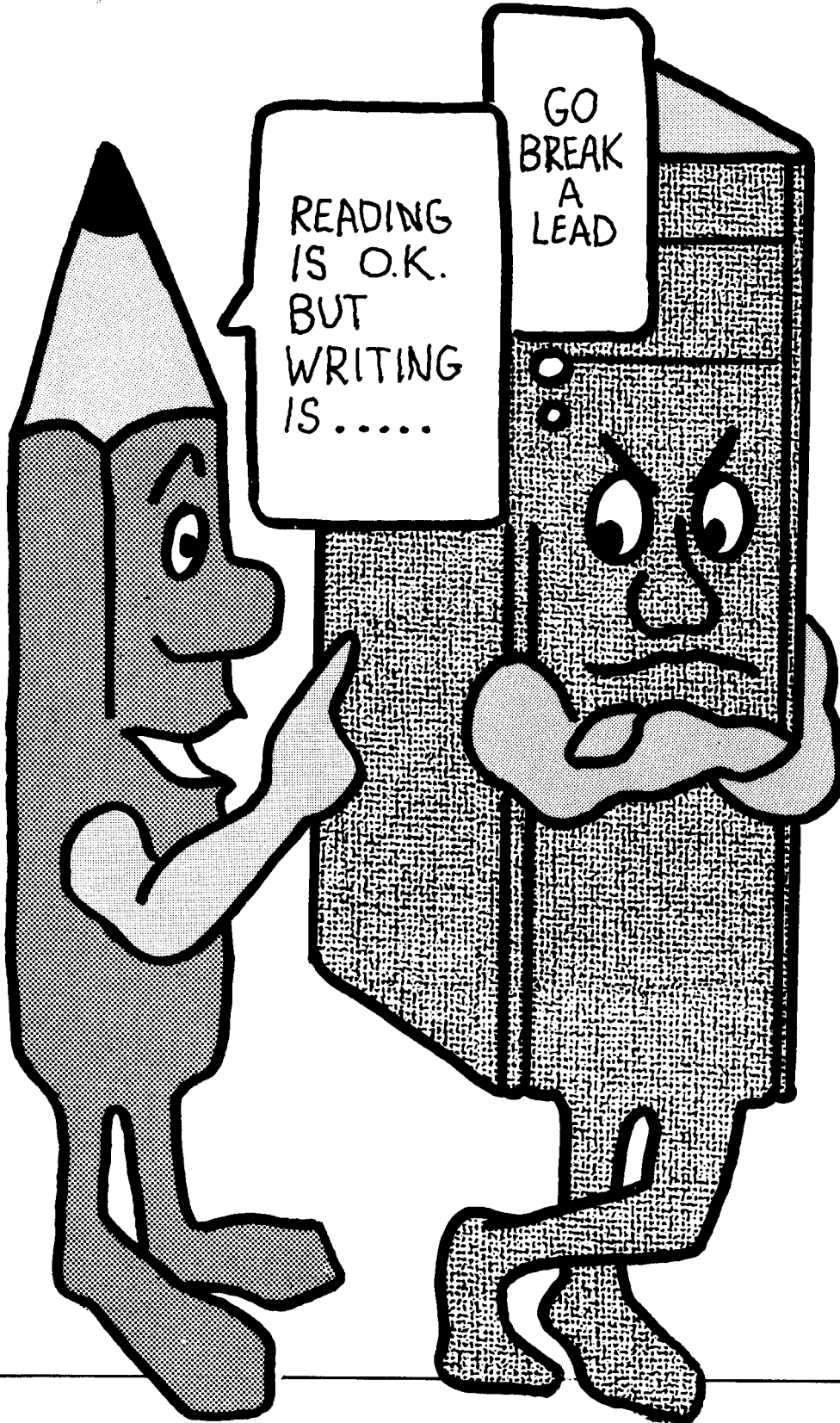


FFORUM

A Newsletter of the English Composition Board, University of Michigan



**Reading
and
Writing**

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Chairman; Daniel Fader
Editor: Patricia Stock
Research Coordinator: Robert Root
Publication Design: David Oliver
Editorial Assistants: Maisah Abdal-Khabir
Teri Adams



A Note About This Issue

Patricia Stock

In this issue of *forum*, several cognitive psychologists, linguists, and educational administrators responsible for coordinating instruction in the language arts, together with a teacher of law, a philosopher, a teacher of writers in the marketplace and three teachers in graduate schools of education, join teachers of English composition and literature in examining the relationships between *Reading and Writing*. From their various perspectives contributors to this issue provide us a richly textured backdrop against which we may view the processes of reading and writing.

Psychologists John Bransford (*Prerequisites for Comprehending Prose*, p. 65), Walter Kintsch (*The Role of Strategies in Reading and Writing*, p. 67), Bonnie J.F. Meyer (*Reading Teachers Plans for Writing*, p. 69), and Ellen Bouchard Ryan (*Two Causes of Underachievement*, p. 71), base their views of reading comprehension and its relationship to the composition of texts upon their own empirical research as well as the research of others. In their articles they stress the strategies common to the processes of reading and writing.

Charles Fillmore, a linguist, reports on the implications of his research into reading for the composition of text (*Reading Research and the Evaluation of Writing*, p. 73); while Robert Tierney describes his research into the processes in which adult readers and writers engage as they make meaning together (*Reader-Writer Transactions: Defining the Dimensions of Negotiation*, p.78); and Donald Graves illustrates the results of some of his research into the writing processes of young children (*Break the Welfare Cycle: Let Writers Choose Their Topics*, p.75).

Michael Torbe, associated with the Local Education Authority in Coventry, England, shares his thoughts on the processes of writing which may parallel the processes of reading and understanding (*Writing About Reading*, p. 80); while Aaron C. Stander, Language Arts Coordinator for the Oakland County Schools in southeastern Michigan, describes methods that teachers can use to enhance their students' reading comprehension and, by extension, their students' writing abilities (*The Reading/Writing Connection*, p. 82).

In their essays, the English composition and literature teachers describe the theories behind their various teaching practices in reading and writing. Ann E. Berthoff stresses the centrality of interpretation (*How We Construe Is How We Construct*, p.84); Barbey Dougherty demonstrates how writers can give readers visual, verbal, and structural cues in texts (*Writing for Readers*, p. 87); Mary H. Jacobsen describes the *Delphi Method* of teaching reading and writing developed by Norman N. Holland and Murray Schwartz

(*Identity, Reading, and Writing*, p. 91); Ronald Shook argues for the case method of teaching writing (*A Case for Cases*, p. 93); and Patricia H. Sosnoski proposes a writing course based upon Wolfgang Iser's critical theories (*Reading Theory and the Teaching of Writing*, p. 95).

A lawyer, a philosopher, and a teacher of writers in the marketplace raise conceptual, ethical, and practical issues for teachers of reading and writing: James White describes a course in legal literacy which asks students to exercise skills common to all literacy — thinking, evaluating, and interpreting, (*A Course in Legal Literacy*, p. 98); Jack W. Meiland raises provocative ethical questions for teachers of writing (*Argumentative Writing: Persuasion or Inquiry?* p. 100); and Janice C. Redish asks teachers to consider creating real or realistic writing assignments for their students (*Preparing Students to Write on the Job*, p. 102).

Karen Wixson, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Michigan, whose area of special interest is reading, provides readers a context for understanding the various thematic essays written for this issue (*Thinking: The Reading-Writing Connection*, p. 104).

In keeping with his contributions to previous issues, Robert Root reviews current publications and articles of interest to writing teachers in his *Resources in Composition* column (p. 118). Francelia Clark and Grace Rueter join him in this issue with their review of a new book on strategies for academic writing (p. 115).

Readers who have shared their news and views in this issue are Edward Hill and Robert Wesolowski, who describe their experience in developing an assessment instrument for evaluating student writing (*Evaluating Ninth Grade Essays*, p. 113), and Joseph DeMent (*Letters to the Editor*, p. 117).

This issue of *forum* (*Reading and Writing*) and the one which preceded it (*Speaking and Writing*) were designed to describe the state of the language arts at the beginning of the 1980's. As I re-read the views of the experts who wrote for the two issues, I recognize insights shaped by revolutionary times. The impact of television and the computerization of print have changed the functions of the language arts. In order to describe the roles and relationships of the language arts in this time of change, some of the experts chose to look back into history, placing their perceptions in silhouette against both the ancient rhetorical theory that flourished with the development of literacy, and the standardization of language conventions that paralleled the spreading use of the printing press. Others chose to look into the future, projecting their visions of the changing roles of the language

arts onto television and micro-computer screens. Some of the experts re-cast the *topoi* of ancient theorists into modern metaphors such as *cognitive structures*, *schemata*, and *strategies*. They stressed the concern of ancient rhetoricians that language use be shaped for audience, purpose, and occasion. Others predicted a new age of "secondary orality": They speculated upon the functions of literacy in an age when print no longer provides the primary support for formal education, and predicted that in such an age reading and writing would function as significant means for human contemplation, for the integration and evaluation of what is

known, and as significant heuristics for what is to be discovered.

Informed by the lessons of past and the promise of the future as well as by the complexity of the relationship among the language arts, the experts have this to say to teachers of writing today: Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are *language acts* as well as *language arts*. They are neither used nor learned effectively apart from one another or from the purpose for their use.

Prerequisites for Comprehending Prose

John D. Bransford
Department of Psychology
Vanderbilt University

NOTE: Preparation of this paper was supported in part by Grant NIE-G-79-0117. The letter about Sally is adapted from a passage that was originally written by Nancy McCarrell.

Dear Jill,

Remember Sally, the person I mentioned in my letter? You'll never guess what she did this week. First, she let loose a team of gophers. The plan backfired when a dog chased them away. She then threw a party but the guests failed to bring their motorcycles. Furthermore, her stereo system was not loud enough. Sally spent the next day looking for a "Peeping Tom" but was unable to find one in the yellow pages. Obscene phone calls gave her some hope until the number was changed. It was the installation of blinking neon lights across the street that finally did the trick. Sally framed the ad from the classified section and now has it hanging on her wall.

Please write soon.

Love,
Bill

Most people have difficulty understanding the preceding letter about Sally. Their problem does not stem from a lack of familiarity with the words; the letter does not contain highly technical vocabulary. Each sentence in the letter conforms to basic rules of English syntax, so syntactic abnormalities are not responsible for the fact that the letter is difficult to understand. Indeed, the hypothetical recipient of the letter, Jill, understands the message perfectly. Why is Jill able to understand while other English-speaking people are not?

The beginnings of an answer to this question were formulated several decades ago by the psychologist Karl Bühler, who argued that language comprehension depends on more than one's knowledge of a particular language. Bühler emphasized that listeners and speakers (or readers and writers) must also share a common "semantic field" if they are to understand one another:

Given two speakers of the same language, no matter how well one of them structures a sentence, his utterance will fail if both parties do not share the same field to some degree. There are inner aspects of the field, such as an area of knowledge, or outer aspects, such as objects in the environment . . . The structure of any particular language is largely field-independent, being determined by its own particular conventional rules, but the field determines how the rules are applied (Blumenthal, 1971, p. 56).

Bühler would undoubtedly argue that Jill can understand the letter about Sally because Jill and the writer share a common "semantic field." In particular, Jill knows from previous letters that Sally has been attempting to do something: She has been trying to get her neighbor to move. Given this information, the letter makes much more sense. (Read it again.)

During the past ten years, psychologists have become increasingly sensitive to the fact that language comprehension involves much more than simply a "knowledge of one's language" (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary plus basic rules of syntax). People rely on their general background knowledge to fill in the gaps in messages; they actively contribute to the comprehension process by making assumptions and inferences. If you look again at the letter about Sally, for example, you will probably discover that you made a number of assumptions once you were informed of her goal. Thus, you probably assumed that the gophers were let out in the neighbor's yard, that the motorcycle and stereo noises were designed to bother the neighbor, that the "Peeping Tom" would have been hired to look in the neighbor's window, that the neighbor's telephone number was changed, that the ad from the classified section said "House for Sale," and so forth. None of this information was supplied in the letter; it was supplied by you.

The letter about Sally is a "trick" passage; it was especially written to illustrate various facets of the comprehension process. (Additional examples of such passages can be found in: Bransford, 1979; Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Bransford & McCarrell, 1974; Dooling & Lachman, 1971). There is considerable evidence that the ability to understand any conversation or text requires the use of previously acquired knowledge to fill in the gaps in messages. (Anderson, 1977; Bower, Black & Turner, 1979; Bransford, 1979; Schank & Abelson, 1977). There is also evidence to suggest that if a person is unable to remember events that were described by someone, or is unable to write a clear summary of the events, the problem may be that he or she lacks the appropriate background knowledge (Chiesi, *et al*, 1979; Spilich, *et al*, 1979). This is a very different explanation from one which assumes that the person has a "poor memory" or has failed to develop effective summarization skills. Similarly, a person may interpret a message in a manner that is quite different from the one intended by an author (Anderson, *et al*, 1977; Bransford, 1979; Pichert & Anderson, 1977; Steffensen, *et al*, 1979). These differences in interpretation may arise because readers have associated the words in the passage with their own knowledge which may differ from that of the writer. Instructors in public speaking classes and in writing classes advise students to

tailor their messages to their audience for just these reasons. If speakers and writers are to be effective, they must be especially careful to analyze what they know about various

situations and to ensure that their listeners or readers are similarly informed.

The Role of Strategies In Reading and Writing

Walter Kintsch
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado

Together with several co-workers I have been trying to model the psychological processes that are involved in reading comprehension (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Miller and Kintsch, 1980). The focus of this work has been on processes of comprehension rather than production — on reading rather than writing, and on listening rather than speaking. However, from the very beginning we have tried not to limit ourselves to processes of comprehension, in part because experimental evaluation of a comprehension model is impossible without some complementary production component, and in part because consideration of text production often illuminates parallel problems in comprehension. This is not to say, of course, that production is nothing but the reverse of comprehension. Such a view might be suggested if our concern were only with analysis of linguistic structures, for such structures are often considered to be neutral with respect to comprehension or production. Since our concern is not with linguistic structures but with the processes involved in producing or comprehending them, we observe that production is much more than a simple reversal of comprehension.

Although the problems faced by readers and writers are different, they are not unrelated; and although it is certainly not the case that a good theory of text comprehension will also serve as a model of text production, a theory of comprehension can provide useful constraints for a theory of production, and vice versa. The two processes will have to share the same framework. If a theory of comprehension describes processes in terms of such levels as the (1) analysis of surface structure, (2) construction of a semantic representation, (3) integration of knowledge, and (4) formation of the macro-structure — the gist of a text — then a production model will have to deal with the same levels of processing. The same propositional format will have to be used for a production theory as for a comprehension theory, and the same sources of knowledge will have to be accessible, retrievable, and useful in both.

It is not only obvious that comprehension and production must be compatible at some levels, but it is also clear that another more subtle connection exists: Successful production requires that comprehension be monitored, just as comprehension itself requires an understanding of production. As many researchers have observed, comprehension is not entirely determined by texts, but is in part the constructive product of active readers. Readers form expectations about what they are going to read and these expectations, in turn, determine how texts will be understood. Readers not

only passively absorb ideas but they also actively produce their own ideas as they interpret and organize text.

In the most recent version of our model (van Dijk & Kintsch, forthcoming) this interplay between the processes of comprehension and production is reflected in the parallels between their strategies. The model assumes both processes to be strategic. In our view, a text contains well-structured, highly-redundant, and hierarchically organized sets of cues on the basis of which readers can reconstruct messages intended by writers. Effective readers learn to use efficient strategies to infer meaning from the cues writers provide, cues such as the words which signal concepts readers know, the syntactic structure, topicalization, and organization of paragraphs which make clear to readers how texts are to be interpreted. Experienced readers know how to make interpretations because they have learned strategies of interpretation based on the cues present in a text. At the sentence level, such strategies are well known and have been studied widely in experimental research (Clark & Clark, 1977); strategies at the text level are described in detail in a forthcoming book by van Dijk & Kintsch in which some initial experimental investigations in the use of these strategies are also reported.

Writers also work with strategies which are different from but complementary to those of readers. The purpose of writing is to provide readers with sufficiently clear cues to enable readers to reconstruct the messages writers intend. Suppose, for instance, that a writer wants to de-emphasize the agent of a sentence and to promote a non-agent to function as a clausal topic. A strategy for doing this in English is to use a truncated passive. Thus, instead of writing *The scholar reviewed the book*, which puts undue emphasis on *the scholar*, the writer uses *The book was reviewed by the scholar*. The reader, in turn, applies a complementary strategy and takes the passive form to mean that the writer wants *the book* to be topical in this sentence.

Accurate descriptions of writing strategies must take into account the multi-level character of the production process. Although finished writing appears to be simply a linear string of words, grouped into phrases and sentences, that is only what meets the eye. According to our model, the actual task of writers is much more complex: Writers must implicitly generate not only a coherent semantic representation, but also a complete hierarchical macro-structure along with their words. Indeed, it is their underlying meanings that writers try to communicate — their words are merely

the means to that end. To describe writing strategies we must describe strategies at all of these levels: strategies for arranging words and sentences appropriately, strategies for generating ideas to be communicated in the first place, and strategies for organizing ideas.

First we must consider planning strategies, which take into account writers' situations and motivations for writing, and result in writing goals. These resultant writing goals then control the next stages in the process of writing: The generation of ideas and their organization at both the micro- and macro-levels. The process of generating ideas is in part one of retrieving knowledge from memory and in part one of generating inferences. At present in our laboratory we are simulating the process of generating ideas in so far as it involves retrieving knowledge from memory by means of a model derived from laboratory research on memory for non-textual materials. The processes of drawing inferences in the generation of ideas are quite complex and are not as yet fully understood. In part, these inferences simply supply inferable information on the basis of information from memory which has already been retrieved. For example, if several people are talking about a flight to New York, each one can add a lot of detail as well as complete action sequences and can invent appropriate particulars simply on the basis of experience in similar situations and knowledge

about air travel. This type of elaboration is easily accounted for, but inferential processes in generating ideas go far beyond elaboration in ways not yet analyzed. Ideas which have been generated and organized according to some scheme, are finally expressed verbally according to the actual strategies of text production. Note that these processes are not sequential: We do not form a plan and then a gist, then get the right ideas and write down the words — all of these processes occur in parallel. Numerous occasions for interactions occur: A felicitous phrase will lead to a new idea, and a new idea will cause a reorganization in the over-all plan. A complex process, indeed, quite unpredictable in its details, but not beyond our understanding in principle.

An important aspect of the strategies of comprehension and production is that they are learned, and hence they can be taught. Once we know explicitly what cues readers respond to and writers strive to provide, then we can figure out appropriate teaching methods. (Implicitly, of course, we have always known cues, in so far as we are experienced readers and writers.) More often than not we shall find, of course, that wise practitioners have advocated and used those methods since antiquity. But even if we can do no more than that, knowing why these methods work or why they do not work can only help us to employ them more effectively.

Reading Teaches Plans for Writing

Bonnie J.F. Meyer
Department of Educational Psychology
Arizona State University

Plans are an important part of the processes involved in communicating and understanding: A writer must evolve some overall plans of what to say; and a reader, in turn, must be able to follow those plans. Plans give a writer a framework or organization for deciding how to structure information on a topic, how to sequence that information, and which ideas to highlight. In this essay I describe the topical function of plans — the aid they give writers in conceiving and organizing main ideas about a topic.

My research has been largely in reading and comprehension, with particular emphasis on the hierarchy of information in text structure. A text is more than just a series of sentences of paragraphs precisely because it follows a hierarchy of content: Some facts (statements, etc.) are superordinate or subordinate to others. It seems plain that such a hierarchy in a text is created by means of a plan; and, furthermore, that readers who are unable to follow authors' plans are at a disadvantage.

Drawing upon the insights which linguistics and rhetoric offer, I have gathered empirical evidence for the existence of five basic writing plans which have an impact upon reading comprehension. These five plans are designated as follows: *causation*, *comparison*, *description*, *response*, and *time-order*. I do not intend to imply that these five types of plans are exhaustive or definitive. I do suggest that they define useful distinctions that may help readers and writers. There is good support for the belief that significant differences exist among readers' comprehension of texts written according to these different plans.

The *causation* plan is devoted to presenting causal relationships, like the "if/then" of antecedent/consequent statements in logic. The *comparison* plan presents two opposing viewpoints, and can be subdivided accordingly: The alternative view gives equal weight to the two sides, whereas the adversative view clearly favors one side over the other. The *description* plan develops a topic by describing its component parts, for instance, by presenting attributes, specifications, or settings. For example, on the topic of frogs, descriptive texts could be generated by describing physical characteristics, one particular variety, the environment of frogs, etc. The *response* plan contains some kind of statement followed by a response, such as: remark and reply; question and answer; problem and solution; and so on. Finally, the *time-order* plan relates events on the basis of chronology.

These basic types are familiar in various contexts. Political speeches are often of the *comparison* type, and in particular,

its adversative subtype. Newspaper articles are often of the *description* type, telling us who, where, how, and when. Scientific treatises often adhere to the *response* type, first raising a question or problem and then seeking to give an answer or solution. History texts often exemplify the *time-order* plan.

Of course, many texts will reflect more than one of these five basic plans. Folktales contain much *description*, *causation*, and *time-order* within a general *response* plan in which the protagonist confronts and resolves a problem. Finally, folktales may carry an overall *comparison* plan, such as demonstrating the contrast between good vs. evil, selfishness vs. altruism, industry vs. slothfulness, and so on.

A research group with which I have been working has been using expository texts to probe how these five types of plans affect reading comprehension. In one study, 102 ninth graders each read two texts; one passage was written with a *comparison* plan, while the other had a *response* plan. The students wrote down whatever they remembered, first, right after reading; and then, one week later. The records of what they remembered were examined to see if the readers were organizing their reports along the same type of plan as was used by the authors of the texts. We then correlated the results of this analysis with the amount that the readers could recall.

The findings were impressive: Only 46% of the students organized the reports they wrote immediately after reading along the same plan as was used by the authors; one week later only 30% of the 102 students organized their reports with the authors' plans. It is significant to note that students who used the authors' plans a week after reading remembered far more content: Not only did they retain the main ideas especially well, but they also recovered more details. These students performed much better on a true/false test on the content of the passage; and they were also the students who had shown good reading comprehension skills on standardized tests. On the other hand, students who did not make use of authors' plans tended to make disorganized lists of ideas; they couldn't recover either main ideas or details very well. These same students also had lower scores on standardized reading tests.

There are two ways of interpreting this evidence: First, the evidence indicates a need to focus reading instruction upon plans, so that readers can effectively learn and remember the materials they study. Second, it indicates a parallel need in writing instruction, so that writers can offer readers the support of recognizable plans. When students are con-

fronted with many topics about which they are uninformed, apparent organizational plans are even more crucial to them than they would be otherwise because unfamiliar content is more easily learned if it is organized completely and clearly.

In order to explore the findings in our first study further, our research team gave a group of ninth-graders a week of training in identifying and using four types of plans — *causation*, *comparison*, *description*, and *response*. The ninth graders read and recalled texts on three occasions: Before training, a day after training, and three weeks after training. Another group did the same tasks, but received no instruction about the plans. After one week and three weeks, the trained group could remember nearly twice as much content from the texts as they could before their instruction; and they could remember twice the amount recalled by the group which had received no training in identifying the types of plans. Moreover, those students in both groups who found and used the authors' plans remembered more information from the texts than those who did not find the plans.

Similar studies have been conducted with older readers. In a sample of junior college students, slightly more than 50% used the authors' plans and thereby retained more of the content of texts than did those who failed to use the authors'

plans. Samples of graduate students and college graduates of various ages (young, middle, old) showed an even higher proportion (80-100%) using the authors' plans to recall the content of texts.

These and similar studies may provide support for composition teachers who assign papers that require students to describe, compare, raise problems, and so on. Teachers can identify these plans for students apart from content and then have students themselves practice identifying and using the plans.

When writers effectively integrate and organize content during writing, readers both remember more of it and spend less time and effort doing so. In light of our research, the teaching of plans in composition classes appears to be time well spent. (Presumably as writing students become more experienced they will automatically use the plans that they have consciously practiced earlier.) When readers and writers are consciously aware of rhetorical plans, both benefit. Certainly plans which can be recognized in texts are a help to readers who are asked to comprehend topics which are unfamiliar to them. Perhaps knowledge of plans which can be identified will both dissuade developing writers from falling back on trite commonplace topics and persuade them to tackle original topics.

Two Causes of Underachievement

Ellen Bouchard Ryan
Department of Psychology
University of Notre Dame

Note: Preparation of this article was supported by the National Institute of Education, Grant No. G-79-0134.

One of the most discouraging experiences for a teacher is working with students who consistently fail to apply skills they possess to tasks at hand and hence perform below their potential level. On the basis of current research in cognitive development and in reading comprehension, we can identify two important reasons for students' underachievement in any academic arena: (1) their inadequate understanding of how to select, adapt, and monitor strategies for learning; and (2) their insufficient motivation to apply the understanding they do have actively. In this brief article, these causes for some readers lack of academic success will be discussed. Since writing requires even more complex strategic behaviors and even greater motivation than reading, these two factors may be of interest to teachers of underachieving writers as well as to teachers of underachieving readers.

For the attainment of any reading or writing goal, an individual has four types of cognitive capabilities available for use: (1) *basic abilities* (i.e., elementary perceptual, motor, and memory processes); (2) *acquired knowledge* (i.e., language skills, word recognition skills, knowledge of the work in general); (3) *strategies* (i.e., purposeful actions taken voluntarily to achieve particular outcomes); (4) *metacognition* (i.e., awareness of one's own thought processes and the executive processing required to regulate the use of basic abilities, knowledge, and strategies).

The research literature concerning successful and unsuccessful readers indicates that the latter often behave passively. For example, even when word recognition problems are eliminated, poor readers tend to avoid strategic activities, such as (1) integrating word meanings within sentences and sentence meanings within paragraphs, (2) attending more carefully to important information than to unimportant details, (3) drawing inferences to enrich the meaning of the text being read, and (4) integrating background knowledge with the text. Likewise, poor readers' passivity is reflected in their lack of planning and monitoring activities, such as (1) identifying goals, (2) selecting a course of action likely to lead to the desired outcomes, (3) monitoring the extent to which their activities are leading in the appropriate directions, (4) revising their plans when progress is not adequate, and (5) checking at the end to determine if their intended goals have indeed been achieved.

Many of the problems of unsuccessful readers are related to their failure to participate actively and strategically in the

learning process. The discrepancy between their capability and their performance can be seen in the striking effects on their reading comprehension of simple (but explicit) instructions to use a particular strategy. Hence, poor readers have been shown to benefit substantially from explicit prompts to employ semantic strategies such as visual imagery ("Make a picture in your mind of the meaning of each sentence"); sentence elaboration ("Invent a reason for the relationships provided in each sentence"); self-interrogation regarding the meaningful units of a complex sentence and how they fit together; self-interrogation regarding the main components of a story; integration of new information with old knowledge; and self-checking. Frequently, poor readers are able to perform as well as their successful peers under such supportive instructional conditions. In a few studies, poor readers have demonstrated the ability to use the strategy they were taught without prompting and even to maintain its use over several weeks. Rarely, however, have studies of training in the use of strategies been able to demonstrate that students can generalize strategies they have learned to complete in one reading task to related reading tasks in the classroom. Thus, even though students can be taught reading strategies, the tendency of unsuccessful learners to perform passively and, consequently, below potential is not modified.

The first major reason for the underachievement of unsuccessful readers is their immature metacognitive knowledge and skills. Students who understand how their minds work, what is easy to do and what is difficult to do, how to go about solving particular problems, and why some problem-solving attempts tend to be more successful than others, are using their metacognitive abilities. Although research on metacognitive differences between good and poor readers is in its early stages, existing evidence confirms the prediction that unsuccessful readers are less able to judge how difficult a task is, how to identify possible strategies for solving it, and how to evaluate the relative merits of those possible strategies. Moreover, they are much less aware than successful readers that the purpose of reading is to make meaning and to integrate new knowledge with what is already known.

The second major cause of underachievement is lack of motivation. The level at which students are motivated is critically linked to the level of students' strategic activities because employing strategies requires more sustained effort than behaving passively; furthermore, regulating the effective use of strategies requires even additional effort and attention. Consequently, whether individuals bother to perform at optimal level depends on their analysis of the benefit to be accrued for the cost expended. For example, the

evening before an examination, students are all likely to read a text much more actively and strategically than two weeks beforehand. Research on what students believe to be the causes of their own successes and failures has revealed important differences between good and poor readers that seem directly related to the passive performance of the latter: Successful readers attribute their successes to their ability and their failures to lack of effort; unsuccessful readers attribute their successes to external circumstances and their failures to lack of ability. Unsuccessful readers tend to exhibit the symptoms of "learned helplessness" in that they expect to fail and feel there is nothing they can do about it. Their analysis of the benefits they accrue from their efforts — even if they understand the link between strategies and outcomes — rarely leads them to go beyond the minimal effort needed to avoid punishment. Due to their history of failure, the causes to which they attribute their failures, and the greater effort required of them, poor readers are unlikely to behave strategically except in conditions where they are specifically guided by a teacher and specifically reinforced for both the desired activities and the products of their efforts.

The implications of this analysis for teaching passive learners are clear: First, explicit instruction in learning strategies can frequently help unsuccessful students to achieve a substantially higher level of performance temporarily. Second, this instruction will probably be short-lived and dependent on context, providing little overall effect on some students' passive approach to other cognitive tasks. Third, to effect students' general use of learning strategies, more serious attempts to have them develop active, self-regulated learning styles must take place. Transforming passive learners into active learners requires that students develop (1) metacognitive knowledge (i.e., learning what possible strategies there are, why they are useful, when they should be used), (2) metacognitive skills (i.e., learning how to set a goal, select a strategy, monitor its use, revise it or switch to an alternative, check the solution, reinforce oneself for success, and cope with failure), and (3) higher motivational levels (i.e., learning to link expectations for success and failure to effort, provide for success experience, clarify reasons why effort will pay off).

Reading Research And The Evaluation of Writing

Charles J. Fillmore
Department of Linguistics
University of California at Berkeley

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Sometimes when we don't understand what we're reading, it's our fault, and sometimes it isn't. The question of whether somebody is a good reader is inescapably connected with the issue of whether what is being read was well written. I have found that the process of imagining or observing readers as they interpret (or fail to interpret) particular texts not only offers insights into the difference between successful and unsuccessful readers but also wisdom about the difference between considerate, well-constructed texts and unreasonable, incoherent texts.

With a group of colleagues and students from different disciplines at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, over the past two years, I have been engaged in a research effort aimed at discovering and representing the ways in which readers experience written texts. Although the texts used in our research are passages taken from standardized reading tests, the approach we take can be applied in principle to texts of any sort. Central to our work is an idealization for which we have acquired a certain fondness, something we call the *Ideal Reader*. The *Ideal Reader* is a hypothetical creature constructed for any given text, a creature who brings to that text just those bits of background knowledge and just those interpretation skills which the text itself demands. The *Ideal Reader* knows everything the text presupposes and is ready to receive everything the text offers. In constructing an *Ideal Reader* for a given text, with respect to what we take to be its correct interpretation, we examine a text in great detail, determine what it "expects" of the reader to which it appears to be addressed, and then we try to characterize that reader. In particular, we try to construct — as the *Ideal Reader* for a given text — someone capable of deriving the proper interpretation of the text, from the language of the text, via the standard procedures for interpreting text where possible, by other means where necessary.

We distinguish the *Ideal Reader* from the author's *Intended Reader*, because our work is deliberately text-bound; that is, any text can demand of a reader skills and knowledge of which the author was unaware because we don't always express ourselves well. The *Ideal Reader* is to be distinguished as well from what we might call a *Learning Reader*. A *Learning Reader* is someone who might not immediately understand the meaning of a word or the semantic force of a

particular syntactic pattern, but can nevertheless make use of the redundancies in the text to figure such things out. And all of these notions have to be distinguished from the text's real readers, those actual human beings that we observe reading and interpreting a given text on a given occasion.

These notions have been developed as a way of describing the abilities and activities of actual observed readers of our experimental passages. It is apparent that any activity which allows us to describe the ways in which readers interact with texts can serve in one way or another to characterize or evaluate those texts. A text intended for children which does not provide the redundancies needed by a *Learning Reader* deserves to be criticized for that reason alone. A text whose *Ideal Reader* is required to have skills and experience which no real readers can be expected to have (such as the ability to read the author's mind) should be rejected on those grounds. For example, we take a text to be well-constructed if its *Ideal Reader* is identical to its *Intended Reader*; and we regard a text as considerate if its *Ideal Reader* is identical to (or contained in) a reasonably large number of its real readers.

Building on the notion of the *Ideal Reader*, the work of the Berkeley Reading Text Project emphasizes (1) the "dynamics" of the experience of reading and understanding a text, *i.e.*, the step-by-step way in which an *Ideal Reader* receives the text, one piece at a time, and gradually builds up its interpretation; (2) the ways in which observable properties of a text (its lexico-grammatical form, its cohesiveness, its general rhetorical structure) determine the necessary characteristics of our hypothesized *Ideal Reader*; and (3) an interviewing technique which enables us — when it works — to monitor actual readers' progress through a text. Our aim is that of discovering just where the skills and experience of given real readers differ importantly from what the text seems to demand.

The interviewing technique, briefly described, consists in exposing readers to a passage one segment at a time and interrupting them after each increment with all sorts of questions about what they have just figured out, what they expect to see or to learn in the next segment, what kind of text they are dealing with, and how what they have just read ties in with what they read earlier, etc. (The method is not as disturbing to the reading process as its description must make it seem, at least with short passages of the kind we have been using. And it can be streamlined for longer texts.) In principle, at least, this method allows us to pinpoint just those places where the observed real readers fail to achieve

what our hypothesized *Ideal Reader* would have achieved at just that point.

Mysteriously enough, experience with this kind of research has not necessarily made good writers of us, nevertheless it has given us all a certain sensitivity to the things that go on between a text and its interpreter, and hence a certain awareness of the things that can go wrong between a text and its creator. The *Ideal Reader* notion, developed from reading research, can serve as a model of their audience to writers. The reading researcher's experience in watching people try to construct interpretations from badly constructed texts can help us aim toward constructing texts whose *Ideal Reader* approximates the real readers to whom they are addressed.¹ For example, we can be aware, as writers, that if we intend readers to experience surprise at a particular point, or to sense closure, or to have created certain expectations at this point, then we can look back in our

¹In our work we deal mainly — but not by coice — with badly constructed texts.

text to see if previous portions of it in fact prepared readers for these experiences. In those places where we sense that the *Ideal Reader* needs to be clairvoyant, or needs to be able to recognize allusions to facts and experiences shared only by an accidental and small portion of the people we want to revise our text. Of it we see that the text's potential readers will need to cooperate in unusual ways with the demands on memory or the challenge of interpretation posed by our text, then we can decide that our text, as it stands, is not suitable for the readers to whom it is addressed.

In short, reading research devoted to uncovering reading dynamics makes us aware of the precise way in which any given portion of text presupposes knowledge or expectations which earlier portions of the text may or may not have succeeded in communicating, or presupposes knowledge or experience which the intended readers might not be expected to have. Our work has convinced us that an inquiry into the nature of a text's demands on readers automatically leads inquirers to insights into the linguistic and structural adequacy of that text.

Break The Welfare Cycle: Let Writers Choose Their Topics

Donald H. Graves
Department of Education
The University of New Hampshire

A seventh-grade teacher left a writing workshop one Wednesday afternoon filled with renewed optimism, only to return seven days later with that tarred-and-feathered look. She was a bit hostile to boot when she reported: "I told my class they could choose any subject they wished for their writing assignment this week. Well, you'd think I'd asked them to undress in public." She glanced accusingly at me: "That was a pretty dumb suggestion . . . letting them choose their own topics. Some asked for a list of good topics. Others asked outright, 'What topics do *you* like best?' Still others complained, 'Our topics are dumb.' Finally they pleaded, 'You give us the topics.'" Apparently murder is preferable to hari kari.

By the time most children reach seventh grade, they are unable to choose topics. Their inability is both a serious symptom and an indicator of many of their problems as young writers: They can't choose topics because they believe writing is an artificial act disconnected from their own lives.

Writing becomes artificial because we teachers make it so. From the time children are in second grade we prevent them from learning to choose topics. In response to our system they go on *writer's welfare*, depending on their teacher, first for the topics of their writing, and eventually for the content and shape of their writing as well. As teachers, we foster their dependency with reasoning that seems to go like this: "Children are afraid to write; worse yet they come to the page with nothing of significance to write about. We'll take care of their problems by giving them topics to write about."

The welfare experience begins. Children are fed diets of snappy gimmicks — story starters, stimulating pictures, "dial-a-story" games, opening paragraphs, open-ended stories to complete, as well as teachers' favorite topics.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Children bring rich experiences and voices to the blank pages we place before them. In fact, children themselves show us much not only about topics but also about how we can help them become better writers. Supported by a three-year grant from the National Institute of Education, Susan Sowers, Lucy Calkins and I have studied the composing processes of young children from ages six through ten. One small sector of our data dealing with the topics of children's writing is reported here. My purpose in reporting

on this data is to demonstrate the importance for children's writing of their choice of topics as well as the implications of these choices for those of us who teach writing.

Choice And Voice

Topics come easily to six-year-olds. They write about personal experiences, fantasies, and information they learn from books about prehistoric animals, weapons, weather, and The sources seem unending. The children are confident; their voices boom through the print.

Unfortunately, for too many, these happy days don't last. Developmental issues intrude. Somewhere between grades one and three, children become aware of the intrusion of audience. The audience includes the children themselves. Children find that other children as well as the teacher react differently to their writing than they do themselves. Until this time children suppose others both interpret their writing and register the same feelings about their writing as they do.

A sense of audience is intensified as these young writers develop as readers. Good readers can be overheard complaining about a book they're reading, "This is dumb. I don't know what to say about this stuff. What's a good subject to write about?" At this stage children's critical skills outweigh their ability to produce texts satisfying to themselves. They look for help. But instead of giving help, we teachers introduce them to the welfare cycle. We ignore their resources.

If we were to help our students, we would lead them back to their resources — to their individual territories, information, and voice. To help students is to encourage them to speak and write about their topics. When teachers help children to speak about their own topics and how they would compose them, young writers find renewal and discovery in the sound of their voices. They hear new information in their own words because teachers listen, reflect, and question them in such ways that they recognize that they are teaching their teachers about what they know. The children in our study in New Hampshire constantly spoke about their writing in formal and informal conferences. Note the voices, sense of process, and control of information in these words of two nine-year-old children as they speak about their topics:

Andrea: *I think I saw "Little White Fish Jumped All Around Us" and I realized – How big are they? Why white? What did they look like? And I realized probably my whole story is like that – blah! Like I have, "I pressed my toes in hot sand." What was it like? How did it feel? So I'm going to do a whole new draft, rather than fix it up. I'll sort of follow along with the other draft, but in my own words.*

Brian: *When I write about the cat and the car running over it, it came to my mind. When we were riding down North Broadway and we saw a burning car . . . I could describe the car burning up – it was a Pontiac, burning the night. Hey, a title! "Flames in the Night!"*

Although both children encounter problems, they articulate processes to solve them. Andrea is highly critical of her piece about the fish but isn't discouraged. She'll do a new draft. Brian discovers a new topic and title in the midst of writing another. These children speak this way only because their teachers have given them responsibility for their topics and help to deal with issues in their drafts.

Topic Choice Helps The Writing

When writers know that the choice of the topics of their writing is theirs, and when they write at least four times a week, they think about topics when they are not writing. One of the significant findings in our study was the quantity of "off-stage" thinking done by children who felt they controlled their topics. When a six-year-old boy, John, found a bat with his father on a Saturday, he rehearsed both the topic and some of the text before he wrote about it the following Monday morning. John knew he could rediscover what happened in the event on Saturday by writing about it. He also knew that time would be provided for him to rediscover the event and write about it when he got to class. In another instance, nine-year-old Amy, who is interested in foxes, chose them for a topic. The night before she was to write, Amy rehearsed the lead to her fox piece for herself.

Children who write regularly and are permitted to choose their own topics are seldom without a topic. Their writing folders contain lists of "future" topics — topics that grow out of their reading, their conversations with other children, their experiences, or their questions. In the course of writing about one topic, inevitably other more interesting topics arise. For these children, some topics are simply saved for another day.

Teachers in our study expressed sincere interest in the topics and information about which students wrote. The teachers interviewed the children about the content and topics of their writing; the children were responsible for teaching their teachers about what they knew. This procedure produced two situations. As writers developed:

1. More problems related to the information in the writing which are usually handled in second or third drafts were dealt with at the point of choosing the topic.
2. The number of drafts students wrote diminished.

The Switch From Choice To Assignment

Writing is, after all, a tool for learning. It is meant to be used in mathematics, science, and social science. It is *not* the exclusive property of personal narrative, fiction, or poetry. Teachers need to use writing as a means of learning; therefore, sometimes the content of their writing will be assigned to students. Even though the content for children's writing assignments in the primary years grows out of children's own choices of topics as it should, the switch from writing about personal topics to writing about assigned topics is easily effected in a very brief period of time. Consider how this shift occurred for the students we studied.

By the second year of our study, many of the eight-year-olds had considerable experience in choosing the topics of their writing and composing pre-writing drafts to clarify their subjects. During the second half of that year, the teacher moved the children in the study toward writing about prescribed content. The switch from personal writing to writing about science and the social studies was barely perceptible. The children were required to use more resources, to conduct interviews, and to learn how to take notes, but the actual composing required of the children in the new genre was little different from their personal writing. These children already knew what it meant to provide supporting information for their claims, to organize toward meaning, to express their topics in precise language.

Choice And Responsibility

Children learn through the choices they make. At the outset of their experience as writers, students' first choices, even second and third ones, are often poor. Fred wants to write about "space," but he is swallowed up by the enormity of his choice. With help, Fred finds he knows more about the "space shuttle" than he does about "space." He begins to learn the power of limits, the meaning of choice.

Our data show: Children learn and benefit from choice; they think about writing when they are not writing; and they learn the meaning of choice by thinking of the information which forms their topics. They find it easier to learn to revise when writing about themes which are personally important to them because there is more depth to their understanding of their topics. They learn to put themselves into their pieces because they have learned to explain and sup-

port the information that developed their topics: They learn the meaning of voice.

We need to break the teaching cycle that places young people on **writer's welfare**. Children won't learn if we think

for them. We want students to talk and write as if they know their subjects because they do know their subjects. We want independent learners and thinkers. We want independent writers. Independence begins for writers when they choose their topics.

Writer-Reader Transactions: Defining the Dimensions of Negotiation

Robert J. Tierney
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University

It is my view that there are no voiceless texts, that every message has its source. I perceive the processes in the production and comprehension of texts as involving shared plans — plans based upon the shared beliefs of the participants, writers and readers. Writers, as they compose texts, consider their readers — they consider the transactions in which readers are likely to engage. Readers, as they comprehend texts, respond reflexively and actively to what writers are trying to get them to think or do. In accordance with these notions, I visualize the nature of the writer-reader relationship as involving three overlapping sets of concerns:

1. A set of concerns of writers for what and how the text might be negotiated by readers.
2. A set of concerns of readers for what writers are trying to do; and
3. A second set of concerns of readers for what they as readers need to do (i.e., for purposes of accomplishing a task or achieving an understanding).

With a view toward defining how these concerns constrain writers and readers, I have been involved in a collaborative research project (with P. Cohen) in which we have tried to examine systematically the various facets of the writer-reader relationship by analyzing writing and reading as plan-based speech acts. Specifically, we are trying to define how a contract to effect communication is achieved in light of constraints imposed by (1) the written mode, (2) writers' realizations of their intentions, and (3) readers' interpretations of those intentions. In this paper I place the data generated from this study within a description of a larger study intended to examine the nature of adjustments which pairs of adults made when they were assigned to communicate in various modalities — telephone, teletype, face-to-face conversation, writing, and audio-tape.

During the course of the larger study, we recorded the interactions of the pairs of adults — an expert and a novice — as one adult, the expert, provided instructions to the other adult, the novice, whose task was to assemble a model. The novice was unfamiliar with the model the expert was thoroughly familiar with it and was responsible for providing all the necessary instructions for its operation to the novice. When the expert wrote to the novice, a *think-aloud* procedure provided us access to the intentions of both the participants engaged in the communicative situation. After a brief training period, writers were asked to *think-aloud* about what they were trying to get readers to think or do; likewise,

as readers read the text the writers' produced, they were asked to *finger-point* as well as *think-aloud* about what they believed the author was trying to get them to think or do. We used split-screen videotapes to merge transcripts of (1) the stated intentions of the writers, (2) the texts, and (3) the *think-alouds* of the readers.

As we examined the *think-alouds* of both writers and readers, we were particularly interested in the match and mismatch between them. At various points in the text the match between the writers' *think-alouds* and the readers' *think-alouds* was unusually close: If writers expressed concern for describing an object by a certain attribute (e.g., color), the readers would focus on the same attribute (e.g. color) during their *think-alouds*. This occurred regardless of the other attributes included in the text to describe this same object. Also, both writers and readers understood the function of certain descriptors without the writers' being explicit about their function: Frequently, writers described an object, expecting — but not explicitly cuing — readers to identify, gather, and assemble the object; at other times, when writers identified an object which was not to be assembled, they cued their readers.

At points in the text, the mismatch between writers' and readers' *think-alouds* was apparent: Writers suggested concerns which readers did not focus upon, and readers expressed concerns which writers did not appear to consider. There was also a sense in which the writers' *think-alouds* suggested that at times writers assumed the role of readers. As writers thought-aloud, generated text, and moved to the next set of sub-assembly directions, they would often comment about *the writers' craft* as readers might. There was also a sense in which writers marked their compositions with an "okay" as if the "okay" marked a movement from a turn as reader to a turn as writer. Analyses of the readers' *think-alouds* suggested that the readers often felt frustrated by the writers' failure to explain why they were doing what they were doing. Also the readers were often critical of *the writers' craft*, including writers' choice of words, clarity, and accuracy. There was a sense in which the readers' *think-alouds* assumed a reflexive character as if the readers were rewriting the texts. If one perceived the readers as craftspersons, unwilling to blame their tools for an ineffective product, then one might view the readers as unwilling to let the text provided stand in the way of their successful achievement of their goals or pursuit of understanding.

I believe that texts are written by writers who expect read-

ers to make meaning, and they are read by readers who do the meaning making. I do not view writing as simply sharing information, nor do I view reading as a solitary activity in which the readers' responsibility is just to extract informa-

tion more or less successfully. Writing and reading are multi-dimensional. They involve concurrently complex transactions between writers, writers as readers, readers, and readers as writers.

Writing About Reading

Mike Torbe

Coventry Local Education Authority
Coventry, England

There is reading; and there is writing. There is writing about reading, and whatever is written has been, and will be, read by someone, even if it is only the writer. The print in a book is the product of one person's imprinting blank paper with meanings that echo in a reader's mind in unpredictable ways; and one effect of that encounter between written word and mind may be that the reader wants to write something, too. Not always *write*, of course. Very often, *talk* is enough. Clayton, a 9 year-old-boy is talking to his teachers:

I'll always read story books. I'll never finish the story book, cos (sic) over the past 6 years I've read 700 books different, all different books, and about 300 all the same book over and over again I still read Watership Down. I read it last night At the beginning it seems ever so exciting, but when you get to the last page (of the first chapter) it seems all sad and horrible because of all the poison and all that

Clayton couldn't have written that: He had to talk it. Asked to write he could only do this:

I have read Watership Down. It is a good book, it is exciting.

The demand to write kills the easy flow of language so obvious in his talk. But writing about reading need not be like that.

The interaction between reading and writing is mysterious, but if we recognize what spontaneous language uses follow from our reading, then we can see what kinds of writing may enable readers to tap their responses to reading. In order to do so, I want (1) to explore five types of inevitable processes of reading and understanding — *rehearsal*, *commentary*, *associative anecdotes*, *thinking aloud*, *enacting consciousness* — and (2) to look at the writing that may go alongside them.

Leigh, a 13 year-old-girl, shows us the most typical and familiar kind of writing about books, which is also representative of the most basic process — *rehearsal*. She does what we all do after an experience — she relives it by retelling it, partly for herself, enjoying the good bits. Her entry in her work diary for her teacher (and for herself) begins like this (Fry 1981):

I've recently read a book called The Lotus Caves by — I think his name was John Christopher. It's about two boys who live on the moon in a confined bubble and

they decide to go and explore first base where the living quarters are, and they find a diary of a man who had disappeared

She continues by outlining the peak episodes of the story — rehearsing it and thus enjoying it again.

Paul, who is also 13, seems at first to be doing the same thing in his writing which is also a diary entry; but he is doing something more. He is offering a *commentary* on his reactions, capturing fleeting thoughts, and his language is, so to speak, transparent: One is conscious of what he is saying, not of how he is saying it.

Today we finished The Island of the Blue Dolphins, and for me it was a relief that she had got off the island. I thought the book was over detailed. Every little movement Karana made was logged and spelled out. The book also lacked much action and I don't think I would have given it the Newberry Medal (Torbe, 1980).

Paul's diary entry seems recognizable to us as a child's writing. But here is a mature, highly sophisticated university lecturer, musing on his own reading in precisely the same way, suggesting that the process of reflecting on response and trying to account for it, is basic to all readers. He has read Rosemary Stuclyff's *Song for a Dark Queen*.

Now this is frightening. The book won the Other Award. Why? Boudicca is a victim — raped, humiliated or insulted somehow by Romans who, being patriarchs, don't recognize her as Queen rather than widowed consort of Iceni — but her suffering makes her wicked . . . I saw it as frightening portent of British civil unrest

If we stay with another adult for a moment, we can see another characteristic response, in which what one reads subtly affects and controls what one writes, and *why* one might write. Kath is a mature student and has been reading Hemingway. Her log book has begun with general comments, but gathers intensity as the reading bites deep into her personal memories. Finally, she seems to forget the book, but in fact writes a cluster of *associative anecdotes* as a direct consequence of her reading, and as a way of testing the novel against her own life.

I first read The Sun Also Rises when I was 17 (1949) and on the fringes of a similar group in Brighton, the most marked difference being their lack of money.