

of the schools. I'm beginning to understand why. Writing those papers, they revert to the common school experience--giving back the teacher's ideas--and the old feelings rise up in them, when they hadn't made themselves familiar with the actualities behind the ideas they were peddling. Unlike those few professional writers who write exposition powerfully, in most school writing students feel no ego satisfaction. Their work earns them no money. They won't lose their jobs if the writing is poor. If they're given a D or an F, they can always sign up for another section of the writing class. They know they're not writing for twenty other people, or hundreds or thousands, but for one--the teacher. It's wrong, this artificial, inhuman communication situation. It won't work. It never has worked. In the May, 1893, Atlantic Monthly, J. J. Greenough reflected upon "the great outcry. . . about the inability of the students admitted to Harvard College to write English clearly and correctly." He said the schools were requiring frequent written exercises that were corrected and commented on by the teacher, and asked, "With all this practice in writing, why do we not obtain better results?"

In the mirror I saw Lois's story about the "funnies" bringing about results in her peers. We have a way to go before the mirror shows powerful expository writing being read in writing classes. To bring that about we must put our students in situations where they feel a need to report, explain, or summarize.

Right now, I'm remembering Lois's paper. It made that room in Michigan shake like San Francisco.

Although retired from teaching, Ken Macrorie frequently conducts conferences and seminars for people interested in writing. His recently completed manuscript Searching Writing is to be published by Hayden Book Co. in the first half of 1980.

TEACHING WRITING WHILE TEACHING SOMETHING ELSE

Peter Elbow

We all teach writing, whether we are biology teachers or economics teachers or whatever. Or else we don't--in which case we make it harder for our students to write well. It turns out we can teach writing without taking any time away from biology or economics. I propose here thirteen ways of doing so. Most of them emphasize writing as process more than as product.

When the teacher insists on dealing with only the end product of writing, she is in effect teaching her students to focus their attention on the writing as if it were a pane of glass in the classroom window. Imagine the help, the relief, if she were to ask the students to focus through the glass to the scene beyond and simply forget about the writing. Those questions, which so often hamstring students who treat writing only as a product, will fade in importance: Did the writing communicate? What does the reader think of my writing? What does he think of me?

To accomplish this shift in focus, the teacher must structure writing activities which require (A) WRITING-AS-INPUT and (B) WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE instead of and in addition to (C) WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION.

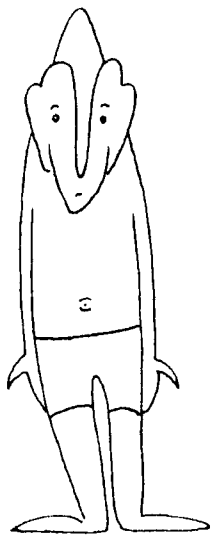
(A) WRITING-AS-INPUT

WRITING-AS-INPUT isn't for others. It is only for the writer. It's not even for the writer as a product that she must evaluate; it is for her as a process. She can happily throw the writing away because the reason for doing it is to help her understand something she did not understand before. The four suggestions below are designed to give students experience in this process.

1) Whenever there is a bunch of input--a lecture or a lot of reading--have stu-

dents engage in 10 minutes or more of writing to help assimilate that input. Students will get much more out of any lecture if the lecture is 10 minutes shorter, note-taking is discouraged, and the last 10 minutes are explicitly devoted to writing. Follow the writing with a "question period." Students will have more and better questions after digesting some implications of their free writing. Also, they will not need notes as much because they will remember ideas and conclusions which they have worked out for themselves.

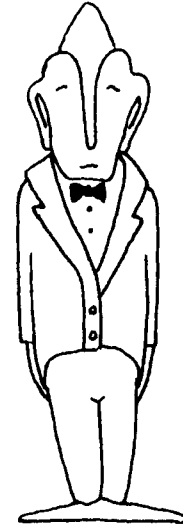
2) Similarly, try starting a discussion with a 10-minute freewriting. One reason so many discussions are tiresome and useless is because students haven't yet assimilated the reading, or the lecture, or some previous experience enough to have a meaty interchange. They have nothing to say. A free writing at the beginning of the discussion can help students chew over the material and reach some exploratory conclusions they are interested in sharing.



SIMPLE SYNTACK

In addition there are three easily recognizable benefits of an opening 10-minute freewriting. First, it gets people warmed up, gets their minds--and to some degree, their bodies--turning over. Second, for even the best students a

discussion is liable to involve doing two things at once: sharing what they think with others and also figuring out what they think for themselves. The 10-minute



CORRECT SYNTACK

freewriting separates the two processes and gives the student the necessary privacy to work out what his own point of view is liable to be. After that is done, it is not so hard to share it. Third, there is a special value in sitting and writing in the same room with others. Even though there is no communicating going on during the 10 or 20 minutes of writing (a criticism some would level), it often puts people in the position of having something to communicate--a position they weren't in before.

3) Have 5 or 10 minutes free writing after a hard question, before anyone responds aloud. The writing gives students a chance to jot things down, collect their thoughts, get to a safer position for responding without fear of being caught saying something silly. This writing often means that everyone benefits from interacting with the question, and, therefore, everyone is liable to carry something away--not just the person who answered under normal conditions. Consider the benefits of this technique when the question asked is hard personally rather than conceptually. Such a question might be, "Can

anyone think of an example from her own life of X causing Y?" After playing with answers on paper, one isn't so threatened by them; one can see them in perspective; and, if necessary, one can edit out a smidgen here and there. The result is that one has control over the response and is often quite willing to share it.



GARBLED SYNTAX

4) Use free writing at the end of the seminar or discussion. The object here is for people to reach some closure, some conclusion, so that they actually carry away with them some of the benefit of the discussion. Students benefit more from their individually worked out inferences than the nice ones we want to work out for them. Something pleases me, in addition, about the symbolism of ending on a note of privacy and separation, each person drawing her own conclusions and then going home.

Remember, however, that this must be free writing. It musn't be judged, evaluated, handed in, or even shared (unless a student chooses to read some of what he wrote as part of an ensuing discussion.) Emphasize that students should not try to produce a good or sharable product but rather use the writing process to explore their own perceptions. But, do press students to keep the pencil moving even if it means writing gibberish or simply describing what they don't understand or

what they feel about the matter at hand. The benefits of the process are lost if the student sits there chewing the pencil or staring off into space.

**(B) WRITING-AS-A-WAY-
TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE**

The activities suggested as WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE require writing to accomplish another necessary task. The tasks are part of the life of every student, although they are often not facilitated by a student's writing. Everyone can think of countless reasons why it is needless or artificial or unfair to write when she could talk. To use these activities requires the exercise of substantial authority.

5) A lot of time will be saved if a student writes a statement of why she wants to join a program (course) and what information she needs to make a sound decision regarding the program (course). There will still be an interview in most cases, but the interview will be shorter and based on what the student has written. The student will think more about what she wants and what are her qualifications.

6) In the same vein, a student may write a statement of why she wishes to leave a program (course).

7) At the beginning of a seminar or course, it is helpful for the teacher and students to write rough, informal pieces telling what they want from the course, what they suspect it will be like, what they cannot tolerate, what it takes to maintain commitment, what are their special requests, and what special strengths they can offer. If these rough pieces are shared, everyone can estimate how much conflict there is likely to be because of differing needs and expectations and think about what changes, if any, need to be made.

8) Employers and schools need to know more about a student's work than a teacher can tell; therefore, self-evaluations are essential. This writing isn't so

much evaluated as writing but as to whether or not it works in the two most critical ways: Does it satisfy the writer? And, does it have the desired effect on the transcript reader? In truth, self-evaluations exert a noticeable benefit on student writing: students learn to say what is true in a forceful, clear way in their own voices.

9) But, our evaluation system is pointed mostly at transcripts. They tend to be written at the end of programs and for the benefit of transcript readers. An equally important job that needs to be done with words is writing evaluations before programs or courses are finished for the benefit of the participants--the student, other students, and the teacher. It is very helpful when students write informal self-evaluations and program evaluations periodically during a course--rougher, more exploratory, more risk-taking than they can afford in a transcript. The goal is not to try to say the right thing but rather to discover, empirically, what happens to be in your head. A first draft is often best. It definitely helps if they are shared with the teacher and perhaps with other students.

10) Yet another task requires content dissemination. Each student might be asked to read one book that no one else reads or do some interviewing or other kind of research and share the results in writing. Writing is necessary so that the results can be read out of class and not take too much time.

None of these writings should be graded or judged as writing but rather as ways to get something done. The question always needs to be, "Did it work?" In other words, do the class members now have possession of the research?

(C) WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION

Although the emphasis in this piece has been on process-writing, I do have several suggestions on the end-product--the essay.

11) Two or three short papers produce more learning and improvement than one long one--even if the total time spent is the same. There is a limit to how much any single paper can be improved, no matter how hard one works on it or how many drafts one puts it through. The student learns more if he gets reinforcement for the strengths of the paper, gets feedback on no more than two important recurrent problems, and then is invited to call it a day on that paper and write a different one.

12) It is especially bad when there is only a term paper due at the end. This means feedback is treated only as evaluation and is entirely wasted as feedback that can help in future writing. If it really does make sense to have a term paper due at the end, make sure that the student has already received feedback on an earlier draft--from you and from other students--so that what comes in at the end represents learning and improvement. On the final draft, the student should receive credit for improvement.

13) It does not follow necessarily that if you require a piece of writing you have to read it. You can require students to turn out a short paper every other week, require that one or more other students give feedback to each paper, and frankly admit that you'll collect the stack of them once or twice a quarter and read only half of each student's writing although you will look through it all to be sure it was done and that feedback was seriously given. Students need help in learning to treat writing as a transaction between peers and colleagues, instead of only treating it as something given to teachers. Student writing suffers from the fact that its only audience is teachers with whom students have such convoluted authority relationships.

If students do plenty of WRITING-AS-INPUT and WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE, they do not have such a hard time with WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION. When they learn to trust and enjoy the writing

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of them. Free writing is subjective and leads inward to the re-discovery of "I." This re-discovery helps the student realize that the "I" is implicit in all writing, even when not expressed. To the inexperienced student, third person writing can be derivative, contrived, dull. There is a need to awaken the inner voice.

From discovery of self as a source for individual expression, the student can more confidently explore his world through observation. Exercise writing in describing objects, persons, or places, in narrating events, in explaining actions or beliefs, extends a writer's skills. He develops his ability to gather, select, and arrange details for effective presentation. Such exploration helps shed indifference to the world.

Two other prewriting activities also effectively involve the student with others and himself. The first necessitates occasional rearrangement of the class into group workshops, where students can gain responses to the potential strengths or weaknesses of their work during preliminary rough drafts. Such group sessions have resulted in the "publication" of "first editions" of student writing. Elbow suggests that all students write on the same topic and read the material of all other students.

Journal-writing is probably the most widely used prewriting technique. Macrorie calls journals "seedbeds" because they provide an opportunity for daily writing, a place to experiment and practice, a casebook for ideas. Good class preparation is needed, however, or journals can deteriorate into dull diaries or catalogues of names and places. Students should be encouraged to write responsively, inquisitively, reacting to themselves and others, to events and thoughts, to studies and plans as well as remembrances. To learn to write competently, one must write often and without fear; the journal satisfies these prerequisites.

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Peer groups should not be the only sort of help provided for student writers, nor should all of them be expected to contribute subjective, emotionally determined responses to the writing of their peers. Just as some students are indisposed to forced subjectivity, so others are admittedly ill-equipped for the cool objectivity of reasoned criticism. There should be a place for both.

Given the variety of writers and kinds of writing, classroom instruction should be various. Not just freewriting, but strategies of structuring, researching, collaboration, and heuristic questioning. Not just personal narrative, but reports, technical descriptions, letters, reviews, advertisements, critiques, abstracts--even drills and exercises. Not just supportive peer groups, but teacher and peer criticism, actual real world tasks and audiences, self-editing--and even handbook instruction. Freewriting, personal narrative, peer groups--all have their place in the classroom. But for too many devotees, these methods become exclusionary. As teachers of writing, we should allow for diverse methods, strategies, materials, or approaches, in the hope that students will find ways to improve the writing they will choose or be expected to do.

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process itself--when they learn that they can just scribble pages full and at the end of the scribbling have perceptions and ideas that are useful--then they will not have such a hard time putting in the sweat necessary to turn the rough mess into an organized finished copy.

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