



WLA Newsletter

. . .writing as a liberating activity. . .

ISSUE FOURTEEN

Fall 1979

FINDLAY COLLEGE

THE LUDLUM FILLER

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Experienced high school English teachers file a few "filler lessons" for days of unannounced field trips, storm-delayed busses or last minute assemblies. When only half a class or half the class time is available, the filler lesson becomes a necessity. But a filler shouldn't be just a time consumer. It can be interesting and helpful to students and to the teacher. The "Ludlum Filler" is that kind of lesson.

First, acquaint students with the repetitive grammatical structure of Robert Ludlum's book titles--The Maratrese Circle, The Gemini Contenders, The Matlock Papers, The Chancellor Manuscript, The Osterman Weekend. With teacher questioning to guide them, students soon recognize Ludlum's pattern: The + Proper Noun Used as Adjective + Noun. Then, using names of school staff members, the teacher creates a few Ludlumlike titles--"The Johnson Composition," for a writing teacher, "The Sweet Triangle," for a math teacher, or "The Starkey Conference," for a guidance counselor.

Depending on the time available give students five, ten, or fifteen minutes to create their own Ludlum Titles. (Some students may need to be reminded that insults
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NOTES ON WRITING IN PHILOSOPHY CLASSES

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Why Papers and Essay Exams in Philosophy?

Many times students question the importance of writing papers, whether it be short assignments of a couple of pages or course-long term projects. And many times students ask me why I give essay exams rather than objective tests. In each case, my answer is two-fold.

First, though it is often debated in educational circles, it is my opinion that students learn more about something, as well as retain what they have learned longer, when they write about it. Writing a paper involves expressing your ideas in words, which in turn involves crystallizing and clarifying the ideas for yourself so that you are able to understand and make sense of them. And all of that, of course involves thinking.

Second, it would be almost impossible to give objective tests in philosophy. Philosophy is not like math, for instance, where there is a right answer and a wrong answer. Indeed, the student is expected to have an accurate understanding of certain concepts and to be able to accurately associate given philosophers with

WRITING IN OTHER COURSES--ROUND THREE

This is the third consecutive issue of WLA featuring the place of writing in classes other than "writing" classes. Richard Smith's lead article on writing in college philosophy instruction follows earlier pieces on writing in junior high school science, in college economics classes, and in literature courses.

WLA is open for more pieces on the topic, too.

specific theories; but this is only the beginning. Philosophy is like an art; you learn not only ideas but also abilities, like thinking, reasoning, evaluating, criticizing, arguing. These abilities simply cannot be measured by objective tests.

As evaluation devices, written papers and essay exams can be important tools for measuring the ability of students to organize, evaluate, and think. Also there can be an educational value. Where papers and exams are returned with comments, the student is given practice in organized, creative thinking about a subject, and an opportunity to check his or her thinking against the standards of someone with more experience in the field. Lastly, for the instructor papers and essay exams provide excellent feedback on student learning.

The Format of a Philosophy Paper

Originality and creativity in expression are encouraged. In other words, you may write in any style that best allows you to communicate your ideas to the reader. But no matter what style of writing you employ, organization of content is very important. The following guidelines may be used as a rough model of how to organize a paper:

1. Statement of the main issue(s). In your own words, clearly and concisely spell out the main problems or questions being dealt with in the assigned reading. This may involve clarifying key terms or ambiguous statements.
2. Descriptions of the author's position. In a straightforward fashion, lay out the author's thesis. Briefly and accurately rehearse in your own words the type of reasoning the author uses to defend his or her position.
3. Evaluation and overall critique of the author's thesis. What this involves may vary from paper to paper. Perhaps you will raise critical questions. Perhaps you will indicate that the author's thesis creates more problems than it solves. Criticism can involve showing how the author is uninformed on some point, or mininformed. It may involve showing that his analysis is illogical in some way, or inconsistent, or incomplete. If you wish to defend the author's thesis, do so by providing additional support or additional evidence. You might wish to add to what the author has said, or maybe revise his or her thesis to make what you think is a more defensible claim. (It is through criticism that understanding is enriched and new conceptions are developed. Thus your paper should reflect a development of your ideas.)
4. Conclusion and summary. Tie things together. Highlight the significant points you want the reader to carry away from the paper. (A conclusion does not necessarily imply that everything has been settled absolutely; in fact, many times a paper will conclude on a provocative note--such that the reader is stimulated to go ahead and do some reflection and investigation.)

A Writing Assignment on Ethics

The practical purpose of moral philosophy is in learning reasons which will allow you to better justify any specific moral act or moral judgment you make. When faced with a moral problem, how can you best solve it? It is here that moral philosophy can be of help. The following writing assignment is intended to give you practice in facing a moral problem, making a moral judgment, and then defending your judgment by argumentation and reasoning. (The example used in the assignment is purely hypothetical, but the consequences for ethical thinking may prove very serious.)

Story: In a small town somewhere in upper New England, a town we will call Stone-town, a local custom which everyone goes along with is that each year on the first of May there is a town lottery in which every family in the community must participate. The person who "wins" the lottery is taken to the town square and stoned to death. This is all part of a religious festival, whereby the death of the lottery winner is viewed as a sacrifice to the gods in order to insure /To page 4/

CREATIVE WRITING:
LET ME MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR, BUT INTERESTING

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Writing creatively concerning creative writing can create a considerable creative crisis for the creator, as compared to just writing. As soon will become apparent, my sustenance is not gained as a professional writer, and so with this in mind please bear with us while we have a go at unraveling the mysteries of writing for both clarity and style.

Producing an article can be difficult for anyone, especially for those of us who do it sporadically rather than in a professional sense. Also, the thought that our efforts may soon grace the bottom of a parrot cage, and that the only people on our mailing list who read are the guys hooked on RTTY [Radio Teletype] can be discouraging. We do, however, persevere to produce, to publish, if not for posterity then for the present and immediate satisfaction of having done so. We are fulfilled in the knowledge that we have communicated in print with our fellow amateurs. The extra boost to our ego and morale comes when a friend murmurs something vaguely complimentary about the last article. Best you not burst your bubble of euphoria by pressing him for details as to exactly what he liked the most about it. It is sufficient unto itself that he knows you did it.

The process by which you fill that blasted blank sheet with words to convey to your chosen audience the concepts and ideas you desire is as individual as a chap's taste for either CW [Morse code] or SSB [Single Side Band telephony]. The intent, though, is universal, i.e., to illuminate, inculcate, elucidate, illustrate, emulate, eradicate, eliminate, or elevate a . . . something . . . Bridging the gulf between blank sheet and finished article can truly be an Herculean leap--however, in this Olympian context, form may count nearly as much as distance.

The written word is exciting to its author; how the word is used makes it interesting to its reader. Ohm gave us the law $E=IR$, and with this equation many an electronic puzzlement can be solved. For the neophyte scribe, these same letters should equate to E (excitement) equals I (interested) R (reader).

Many an old time ham can make a bunch of resistors, nuvistors, transistors, thermistors, or nameless . . . istors into a dandy QRP [low power] something or other and in like manner, the amateur Amateur writer can delve into his mental junk box, choose the proper adjectives, words, phrases, and sentences with which to produce a nifty ham article. The underlying principles for both endeavors are the same, to wit: have a clear concept of the final product and its intended use, who'll be using it and their level of understanding, a good plan of attack, careful execution, and a large amount of imagination. It should be born in mind that two items may serve a similar function, but it is that indefinable style or flair that sets one above the other. Clarity first, yes, then just a touch of PIZAZZ.

Words are your raw materials, a piece of paper your canvas, and a writing instrument your tool. Your pen may assume many shapes, a sword with which to parry and thrust, a cudgel with which to belabor an opponent or even a point, a torch with which to illuminate dark recesses of our knowledge, or a feather with which to tickle the fancy.

Hue, intensity, flavor, and character of words painted determine the texture of the finished product. Different pen strokes for different literary folks, to coin a paraphrase. For mine own part, I strive for clarity, seek effect through /To page 5/

This piece was originally printed in the Amateur Radio News Service Bulletin, May 1979. It is reprinted under Amateur's blanket reprint policy. Thanks to Jim Apsey, a WLA reader in Toledo, Ohio, for scouting this article.

Ludlum Filler, ctd.

are not permitted. Their goal should be appropriate, unusually, good-sounding but rhetorically correct combinations.

Mr. Williams, a principal, inspires "The Williams Rule," "The Williams Principle," "The Williams Doctrine." Mrs. Price, a drama teacher, inspires "The Price Encore" and "The Price Rehearsal." And some students discover the effectiveness of alliteration with "The Troup Test," "The Starkey Session," "The Price Play," "The Williams Warning."

Skillfully handled, the lesson can accomplish several things. Some students finally realize that usage determines parts of speech. Others become aware of alliteration and how it contributes to style. Some add new nouns to their vocabularies. Others may learn how to spell a new word or even how to spell the teacher's name. A teacher can use the titles to stress the importance of sound in revision. "The Price Play" sounds better than "The Price Drama." And this filler can serve, too, as an introduction to sentence modeling exercises. From imitating the structure of a phrase to imitating the structure of a simple sentence requires only one more step.

The Ludlum Filler challenges students to think, to be creative, to be original, but within certain acceptable boundaries. It is a lesson students receive enthusiastically and a lesson they can find useful in their work with sentence structure, vocabulary development, and revision.

Writing in Philosophy Classes, ctd.

a bountiful harvest in the coming year. QUESTION: Is it morally right in Stonetown to stone to death an innocent individual each year as part of the annual May festival?

Task: -Read the chapter on "Absolutism and Relativism" in the text.

-In the first part of your paper, pretend you are an absolutist and answer the question. Discuss some reasons or arguments an absolutist might use.

-Next, pretend you are a relativist and answer the above question. Spell out reasons the relativist might give.

-Lastly, by way of evaluation and criticism of the above views, indicate how you would respond to the above moral question. Indicate your reasons. Perhaps clarify your position by giving some other examples.

Grading

I start out with the assumption that I am reading an average paper or text. Expected of any "C" paper would be a direct and appropriate response to the given topic. Relevant philosophical concepts, arguments, or theories would be accurately described. And the paper would be readable, i.e., having proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Any paper lacking in one or more of these respects would be graded downward.

Given the "C" starting point, the paper must, as it were, work its way up the ladder to a better grade. Through a variety of ways the paper must prove to me how and to what extent it is "above average." Some of the possibilities include:

- Excellent clarity, organization, and grammar.
- Evidence of creative thought: the use of original examples to illustrate points; use of imagination in the interpretation and explanation of concepts or ideas.
- Evidence of philosophical perception: raising important questions, revealing subtle problems.
- Critical assessment and/or argumentation of the basic issues: coming up with original arguments or original points of criticism.
- Articulation and defense of personal views.
- Completeness in covering the topic: surveying the different possibilities, and critically comparing divergent points of view.

Creative Writing, ctd.

unusual word usage, try for some humor, and settle for as much pride in accomplishment as my creation will allow. I can almost hear someone saying as they read, "He sure missed on all those things." I'll just pretend that comment got lost in the QRM [man-made static].

In a more practical vein, my own bent is to mull over an idea for an article for a goodly while, do an outline, go through a couple of rough drafts and finally complete typed copy. The latter may suffer a half dozen revision and deletions. Thence to a final preliminary draft. The next phase encompasses a series of word and punctuation changes, resulting in a nearly finished copy which I have someone read to me. My ears hear the words and my mind listens for the music. If the two strike discord . . . its back to the writing board. Believe me, I envy those who can dash off a little something in one try. By far and away, the most difficult task is to take all the beautiful but deathless words and phrases that just do not fit and RIP them out of the text. I am heartened, though, by the knowledge that words are an endlessly renewable resource, and I will soon again have the chance to use them. Everyone to his own style of writing, which after all, represents the synthesis of the past and present experience strained through the reality of our current existence. Be not afraid to shun the mundane, and experiment with archaic and unusual or just plain wierd word constructions. Word games should be fun while you write.

Logic dictates, dear reader, that in all likelihood you have not read one original idea in all of the foregoing. But perchance having some of the old ones rearranged could provide food for thought. Creative writing methinks is more attitude than art, mind set than method. Would only that my poor doggerel might in some small measure ease the oftentimes painful process by which man's thoughts find their way onto paper. Do I hear someone say, "that he hoped that Lid [incompetent radio operator] was better at CW than he is at writing?" Well, I guess style is also a matter of taste. 73 [best regards].

WLA FEATURED IN NEW REFERENCE WORK

WLA Newsletter is one of about 100 periodicals included in A Directory of Publishing Opportunities for Teachers of Writing. The book, edited by William F. Woods of Wichita State, contains addresses and notes on the editorial needs of American and Canadian publications. It is organized by subject headings and also indexed by geographical location. The book is available for \$3.50 from Community Collaborators, Box 5429, Charlottesville, VA 22905. For how the directory describes WLA, see below.

ABOUT WLA

Key editorial concerns: (1) The fundamental compatibility of creativity and discipline in good writing instruction. (2) The role of writing classes in freeing student imagination and creativity. (3) Ways that teachers can expand the range of instructional options available to them. (A Directory, p. 21)

A NEW BOOK FOR WRITING TEACHERSCOMPOSITION AND ITS TEACHING: ARTICLES FROM College Composition and Communication DURING THE EDITORSHIP OF EDWARD P.J. CORBETT

has been published by the Ohio Council of Teachers of English to honor Ed Corbett, a long-time leader in the group.

The book contains 21 articles on the composing process, rhetoric, writing and thinking, error analysis, the paragraph, basic writing, conferencing, and the teacher as researcher.

Among the authors in the collection are Mina Shaughnessy, Robert Gorrell, Janet Emig, Frank D'Angelo, Ann Berthoff, Lee Odell, Lou Kelly, Donald Murray, others.

An Advisory Board of 30 college and secondary teachers assisted in the selection of articles. There are Forewords by William Irmscher, Chair of CCCC, and by Richard Larson, new editor of CCC.

Composition and Its Teaching costs \$4.95 (including postage). WLA readers can order at a special rate. Clip a check for

\$4.15 to the address portion of the back page and correct or add your address. Make checks to OCTELA. Mail orders to Richard Gebhardt at the address on the back sheet.

SUBMISSIONS INVITED FOR WLA

WLA welcomes articles by college, high school, middle grade, and elementary teachers. Articles should be very short; should relate to one of the three Key Editorial Concerns sketched at the bottom of p. 5; and should grow out of practical classroom experience. Long quotations should be avoided, and documentation should be included parenthetically.

Submissions for these departments are especially welcome:

Teaching Tips--2-3 page outlines of how a teacher approaches a specific task or organizes a unit of a writing class.

Interconnections--Views of materials or approaches from one level of instruction (college, high school, elementary, etc.) from the point of view of a writer who teaches at another level.

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WLA NEWSLETTER

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Third Annual

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES
ON LITERATURE CONFERENCE

Findlay College
Saturday, 1 March 1980

On Saturday, 1 March 1980, advanced high school students from Ohio schools will meet at Findlay College for the third annual Student Perspectives on Literature Conference.

The meeting, resembling professional conferences in which people read papers for their peers, allows honors and college prep students to meet and talk about literature with other students who care about literature enough to come to a Saturday meeting!

The conference was started by the Findlay College English Faculty to provide some rewards for students who do care about literature, at a time when literature faces very stiff competition for student attention. The aim of the conference is to reward writing about literature that is genuine and shows the student's own responses--rather than to encourage freeze-dried literary criticism. Prizes are given for the best papers, and certificates of participation are awarded to all who read their papers.

Submissions are needed. Write the WLA Editor for more information.

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