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A proposed course of study for freshman English

Rose Mathews Christensen

Iowa State University

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A PROPOSED COURSE OF STUDY FOR FRESHMAN ENGLISH

by

Rose Mathews Christensen

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Subject: English

Approved:

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Of Science and Technology
Ames, Iowa
1970
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to propose a course of study for freshman English at Sioux Falls College, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The writer is more familiar with the liberal arts college than with a state university after graduating from Ottawa University in Kansas and after teaching for two years at Sioux Falls College, both liberal arts, Baptist-related institutions. The following comments are suggestions, based on research and teaching experience, for establishing a freshman composition course at Sioux Falls College. They are designed to inform and guide instructors who will be teaching the course. A calendar of objectives and sample theme assignments accompany the text to further illustrate the nature of the course.

The present enrollment at Sioux Falls College is 700 full-time students; the projected enrollment for 1980 is 1000 students. Standards for admission require that a student be in the upper half of his high school graduating class, or that he have a minimum composite score of 18 on the American College Test. (The average ACT score was 21.7 in 1967-1968, and 21.2 in 1968-1969.) Most students qualify in both categories; those who do not are often veterans from the armed forces, and the College usually makes exceptions for them when maturity and motivation predict that they will be successful students.

Most students are Midwesterners, coming from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Colorado, Iowa, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, although usually 30 to 35 states are represented in the entire student body. Whereas many students come from farms or small towns, about 33
percent come from cities of from 40,000 to 100,000 population, and 10
percent come from cities over 100,000.

The liberal arts curriculum at Sioux Falls College emphasizes
breadth of knowledge. Courses in physical science, social science,
fine arts, and the humanities are required in addition to the require-
ments in the student's major field of study. From 50 to 55 percent
of Sioux Falls College graduates become public school teachers; another
25 to 30 percent enter business; the remaining 15 to 20 percent enter
graduate and professional schools.

The present freshman class numbers 226, and this makes an average
of 23 students in each of the ten freshman English sections. Fresh-
man English is required at Sioux Falls College, as are literature and
speech courses. The freshman English course would become, in this context,
primarily a composition course, rather than the present introduction to
literature with themes squeezed in on Fridays. The introduction to
literature would come during the required sophomore course.

Ideally, a freshman English course is concerned with communication
(i.e., the expression of thoughts), primarily with written expressions
(both reading and writing), but also with oral expression. However, the
required speech course at Sioux Falls College will emphasize oral expres-
sion just as the sophomore introduction to literature course will empha-
size published written expressions. Thus, the freshman course can special-
ize in composition: how to express thoughts in writing. Actually

A one-semester, no credit writing laboratory is required of stu-
dents of sub-standard performance in grammar and usage before admittance
into the freshman English program. Entrance examination scores and im-
promptu themes are the determining factors for this remedial laboratory.
these three required courses have a united purpose, and the students must realize the interdependency of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills in all aspects of communication.

The following proposed course of study is an attempt to combine some major advantages of several different approaches to freshman English. Forms and style from the classical rhetoric approach and word interactions from semantics create the basic structure of this composition course. Because of the liberal arts curriculum requirements at Sioux Falls College, the humanities or western civilization approaches do not seem necessary, although the correlation of ideas and trends which these approaches develop is an essential part of the following course's philosophy. The reading assignments try to maintain the aims of liberal education, while the writing exercises advance the students' ability to think and to express those thoughts about all areas of concern. The objectives of this proposed course, however, could be adapted easily to fit a thematic approach.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

No attempt has been made to divide this paper into sections which discuss the reading, writing, and thinking objectives separately. Rather, much effort has been made to integrate these three areas and to achieve the objectives simultaneously. The reading assignments illustrate writing techniques, but they also present opportunities for development of critical thinking and reading skills; the writing exercises provide opportunities to express thoughts clearly, but first they stimulate thinking and demand a synthesis of ideas read or discussed with background experiences. Class discussions must demonstrate how clear thinking accompanies good writing and critical reading, and must always strive to help students implement these procedures in their daily lives.

The table below shows how the objectives of freshman composition may be arranged for a nine-month course. Although the nine divisions of the material would seem to correspond with the nine months of the school term, this correlation is not possible: classes will progress at different rates, and it is important that the students have thorough understanding of one division before moving on to the next. Class discussions and reading assignments have been coordinated with the rhetorical objectives, and the theme assignments have been arranged in order of difficulty, climaxing with the hardest: the term paper. In each series of three divisions much care has been taken to include a study of language, style, and rhetoric in the reading assignments, class discussions, and writing exercises.
The break for the semester probably will come after Division IV (Style). The second semester could then begin with whatever review of style and exposition is necessary before proceeding with V (Affective Language) and VI (Persuasion). Writing assignments appear less frequently in the calendar for the final three divisions, but expository and persuasive techniques will need to be perfected before the students begin their term papers; thus, several short assignments may be needed to supplement the suggested writing exercises.

The reading assignments will be longer in the second semester because novels, plays, and non-fiction books have been included. Newspaper or magazine articles, or texts of speeches released to the press (such as the President's State of the Union Address) should be inserted into the course whenever relevant to the immediate course objectives. This will help maintain student interest and demonstrate the transfer of knowledge from classroom into society.

A word about the last three divisions. The term paper should not be due within the last two weeks of the school term. Too many other things are demanded of the students--and instructors--then. Term papers should be completed early enough to allow discussion by the class after they have been evaluated by the instructor (just like other theme assignments). This discussion may be handled in small groups of four or five students. If shorter library papers are substituted for the longer term paper assignment, they can be included in any of the last four divisions. Some class sessions may be cancelled to permit individual conferences on the term papers.

Division IX (Integration of Skills) may appear a waste of time,
but it has merit, and it has been included for that reason. One value is that it helps force instructors to keep on schedule to allow extra time at the end of the course. (Note: If time did run out, it would be better to omit Division VII [Language Study] rather than number IX.) Students need time to think, and they need opportunities which demand that they use their increased maturity to understand their growth and development. A true integration of the skills in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking can come in the final weeks of the course if time is allotted for discovering the relationships.
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CLASS PROCEDURES

Class discussions in this proposed composition course should center on clear thinking and critical reading, while students demonstrate their progress in fulfilling sequential theme assignments. Themes written in class will reveal the students' habits in organizing thoughts and expressing them in a limited amount of time; themes written out of class will display the students' abilities in gathering material and in writing longer, more complex papers, ones which have been more carefully planned and revised.

Class time should include discussion of weaknesses and strengths found in the students' themes. The problems will undoubtedly outnumber the praiseworthy aspects, but much learning results from positive illustrations, and much improvement of morale results from praise of a job well-done. This latter point is very important in the teaching of writing; the positive attitude of the writer must be cultivated so that he knows he is at least partially successful.

Rhetoric and language study are the true content of a composition course, and these necessities cannot be dismissed by abolishing freshman English as Warner Rice and Charles Moyer suggest. It is true that students of sub-standard English proficiency should have no admittance to college, but one cannot assume that students with proficiency in grammar (as Rice says, with "no gross errors") have the accompanying rhetoric and language skills. Later Professor Rice concedes that

"expression is intimately bound up with the argument," but he does not indicate how the English proficiency entrance exam he suggests will adequately test this area of knowledge or achievement.

A correlation of correct mechanical skills, argument, and presentation must be achieved in a freshman composition course. To delay this unification of vital skills for two more years, as Martin Steimann's hypothesis to substitute junior English for freshman English suggests, is to hinder the students' overall educational development. Students must learn as soon as possible how to make words and ideas fit together. Albert Kitzhaber advocates devoting 20 percent of the year's course to a study of logic in order to adequately teach the logical presentation and expression of ideas.

Lectures and class discussions are the practical ways of handling this information, although writing workshops which specialize in individual help are, as Professor Charles Moyer says, very important to the success of the students in the course. But it is impossible to visualize a course which has no opportunities for reading and discussing sample themes, analyzing essays for rhetorical or logical form, or studying the language, or doing so only in individual conferences.

3 Rice, p. 365.


Themes written by the students determine which aspects of rhetoric and semantics need immediate attention and which can be taken up later in the course. Imaginative literature and belles-lettres are included in the composition course as (1) a source of ideas to stimulate student thought; (2) as material to analyze for evidence of clear thinking and clear expression; (3) as material which illustrates rhetorical devices and styles. Literature cannot be divorced from rhetoric and language study. Form and content are inseparable, and the student must see this relationship in literature or other serious writing before he can accomplish it in his own writing. Thus, the teacher must help the student integrate reading, writing, and thinking, and recognize the interrelationships.

How much language study should be included in a composition course is difficult to say. Professor Kitzhaber suggests 20 percent of the year's course for language study, and 40 percent for rhetoric. Since much of the semantic and stylistic discussions intermingle the divisions of rhetoric and language, measurement becomes complicated. Of course, the amount of time is not the concern; the concern is the quality of instruction. By including elements of language study in discussions of rhetoric, the course becomes unified; by incorporating reading assignments and language study in writing exercises, the course becomes interrelated.

For example, in a rhetorical unit on definitions, the students may be intrigued by making up a word, determining its spelling, and

7 Themes, Theories, and Therapy, p. 144.
writing definitions for it in various contexts. Besides being an imaginative exercise, this assignment focuses attention on the details associated with making a noun into an adjective, a verb, or a verbal. Another example, which unites language, writing, and reading, is to assign a response theme after reading Ogden Nash's "Laments for a Dying Language," Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, or Charles Fries' "What Is Good English?" In these instances students could refute the author's arguments and supply their own examples of correctness based on current usage.

A pleasant assignment, which almost no student objects to, requires reading jokes, anecdotes, or humorous essays. As a follow up, trying to write jokes, anecdotes, or humorous essays may prove to be the most challenging assignment of the course, but a worthwhile one, since humor depends upon skillful handling of the language. A variation of this assignment could be a serious analysis of the humorous effects in the language of Bill Cosby, Bob Hope, Bennett Cerf, Cornelia Otis Skinner, Art Buchwald, and James Thurber.8

Traditional grammar and mechanics as formal subjects of study should be excluded from the college freshman composition course. Since these "rules" have been taught and retaught in the elementary and secondary schools, the colleges are justified in requiring proficiency in written English for admittance. However, insights from new grammars and other elements of linguistics may well be introduced

8 Grace Wilson's *Composition Situations* (Champaign, Ill., 1966) offers many suggestions for incorporating language study into writing assignments.
into the course. Students may delight in and profit by a study of slang, dialects, or the need for a universal language. Some history of the language may be included, as well as etymology, phonology, or a look at the I. T. A. or George Bernard Shaw's alphabet. Usage, diction, semantics, and style, with some attention to syntax, will receive the most emphasis in language study, and these can be taught when the needs arise, not necessarily in pre-determined units.

The total number of themes or total number of words written in the composition course depends upon the particular class and the demands upon the instructor. Generally themes will average one every ten days, but the important thing is that the students are prepared for the next theme assignment. The previous theme should be revised by the student (This process of revision will be discussed more fully later.) and returned to the instructor. The new assignment should be introduced to the class one week before its due date, and sample themes should be read to the class to supplement the explanation and class discussion. Short assignments from 100 to 300 words may prove more effective than the usual 500-word theme because they force the students to be explicit. Since short assignments can be made frequently and since they can each emphasize a specific technique or problem, they may provide distinct advantages early in the course. Probably a mixture of short and long assignments throughout the year is best, for then the advantages of each are gained. Themes of 500 words or more help students combine techniques and give opportunity to develop emphasis and to establish continuity.
Theme assignments must be carefully formulated by the instructor for his particular class. A list of topics written on the chalkboard is not an explicit assignment; it is merely a list of topics. Theme assignments should (1) state the purpose of the exercise; (2) indicate the techniques which may be included or excluded; (3) specify a particular audience; and (4) suggest the length of the theme. Possible topics may also be included.

(1) The purpose of the paper will be to urge or persuade (in persuasion), to show feeling (in description), to show how (in exposition). The purpose will be determined by the rhetorical form or stylistic device which the class is presently studying, and the students' skills. The main idea (or subject) is a part of the purpose; in exposition or persuasion this will be the thesis or proposition; in description it will be the theme. The main idea may be stated or implied, but it must be suggested early in the paper. In long assignments (over 500 words) more than one rhetorical form may be combined; for example, an assignment in classification may ask the student to employ narration and description as well.

(2) By suggesting certain devices ("use satire or irony") and cautioning about probable difficulties ("remember to use the same classifying principle throughout the theme"), theme assignments can be enriched through the foresight of the instructor. Young writers appreciate some guidance in formulating their responses, especially on themes written in class.

(3) The teacher is not the only audience for a given theme. Students should write with a particular reading audience in mind.
Often the students' peer group is the audience; but if the topic permits, it may be advantageous to choose a group of high schoolers, businessmen, or parents, or even the state legislators as the audience. Writing to a specified audience helps the writer to acknowledge his own background and theirs, and to formulate the appropriate tone and language. It also helps create the desire to say something, now that there is "someone" to say it to. It helps focus the purpose too, for the writer aims for a desired response from the audience: sympathy, understanding, belief.

The instructor should not necessarily be the first one to read the theme. A student may volunteer to read his paper to the class; or students may evaluate each other's papers before handing them in to the instructor. Sometimes it may be desirable to encourage students to submit letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines (especially campus or community ones), or proposals to the Sioux Falls College Student Senate or the Sioux Falls town council. This will satisfy the students who desire real audiences, not make-believe ones.

(4) The length of the assigned theme is important because it tells the student how much is expected of him. (Of course, the length depends upon the students' skills; as the course progresses and skills expand, the assignments can be longer. This is true of in-class as well as out-of-class themes.) A 200-word theme will not need as many detailed examples as a 500-word theme. Also the shorter the assignment, the narrower the topic. To some extent the student can determine how much time he should allot for planning and writing an out-of-class theme by looking at the word limit. Certainly he can see that the
800-word theme will demand more than a 300-word one. In-class themes will, of course, be briefer than out-of-class themes, although toward the end of the course, better students will be writing as many as 700 words in fifty minutes. Sample theme assignments follow the text. (See pp. 30-34.)

All writing assignments should have an aspect of creative writing incorporated in them. If the creative element cannot be expressed in the explanation of the assignment, it must be suggested in conferences with the students. For example, a persuasive theme need not be entirely expository writing. By including dialogue or descriptively narrating a personal incident in the introduction, the student develops his creative instincts and enlivens his persuasive theme. Likewise, essay tests should allow the students some opportunity for originality. For example, a question which asks for a concluding scene in Point of No Return where Roger tells Molly he did not get the promotion (caution: Roger and Molly must remain consistent with Marquand's characterizations) accomplishes the same results as one which asks for an expository treatment of Roger and Molly's response to the disappointment. In fact, the creative scene probably reveals more about the student's understanding, for he is able to show, not tell, what happened. In letting the details speak for themselves, the student must be selective and precise in what he includes in the scene. In addition to answering the question the student has an opportunity to respond with originality.
READING, WRITING, THINKING EXERCISES

Although a course begins where the students' needs dictate with freshmen at Sioux Falls College, generally the course should begin with a review of sentence and paragraph development. Several brief writing assignments (100 words or less) will help the students gain confidence in this area. Experimentation with word orders, sentence arrangements in a paragraph, and sentence variations will demonstrate the versatility of the language. The student must realize the varying effects he can achieve. Simple narration and description are two rhetorical forms which lend themselves readily to these writing exercises.

For instance, the instructor may ask students to narrate a brief personal incident, one or two paragraphs in length. "Tell the story in first person and do not make any special attempts to keep the reader in suspense about the outcome of this incident. Then, rewrite the above selection, keeping basically the same content, but changing the words, the word order, and the sentence arrangements. This time use third person. Suspensefully develop the narrative so that the climax is revealed in the final sentences. Select a different title for each exercise."

Or the assignment could be to describe a room so that its atmosphere is the dominant impression of the paragraph. "Rely on sensory details. Assume that your peers are the audience; try to gain their approval. Rewrite the paragraph using the same details to create a different dominant impression. Assume that a fireman, a detective, or an old lady from the historical society looked at this room. What
would he (she) see?"

In conjunction with sentence and paragraph development goes preliminary work in semantics. Discussions of symbols, referents, images, connotations, and contexts will make the student conscious of the power of words. Since precise meanings are necessary for constructing sentences and paragraphs which convey the writer's intent to a particular audience, the student sees how form and idea are indivisible. Here again, several brief writing assignments will provide more opportunity for student growth than a lengthy theme assignment. Precise diction, like vocabulary building, comes from repeated opportunities for practice. A class discussion might analyze the differences in meaning in the following sentences:

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die. (Isiah 22:13)
Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die. (misquotation)

A test question (with books open) may ask students to analyze a paragraph for highly emotional words, and then to rewrite that paragraph making it more objective and informative. The students will be prepared for this kind of assignment after class experimentation with designating terms as "neutral," "favorable," or "unfavorable" (elected official, statesman, politician), and with Bertrand Russell's "conjugation" of an "irregular verb":

I am firm. You are obstinate. He is a pig-headed fool.


A unit of poetry study would be appropriate at this time in the course. Any literary genre could be used for diction analysis, but poetry is especially suited because of its brevity and disciplined nature. Poetry by Milton, Keats, Frost, or Dickinson (or any other good poet) will demonstrate the interaction of words. A look at a Housman poem in its initial manuscript stages and in its final form will demonstrate the poet's concern for precise diction. (It will also show the student that good writing does not simply pop out of one's head and onto the paper.) Poetry provides opportunities for discussing figures of speech, irony, and affective language, techniques which the students may employ in their narrative and descriptive paragraphs. Most importantly, though, poetry study will show how thinking and writing (idea and form) are integrated.

Three examples of assignments for poetry study follow:

A. Analyze some of Pope's couplets ("The Balance of Europe," or "Epitaph Intended for Sir Isaac Newton") for clever and pithy use of language.

B. Look at Emily Dickinson's "I Heard a Fly Buzz" to see effective use of suggestion or implication. Use the following questions to analyze the poem's diction, and thereby approach the poet's true meaning.

1. What is the tense of the verbs? Why is this significant in this poem?
2. In Stanza 2 what do "eyes" and "breaths" refer to? In Stanza 4 what does "windows" refer to?
3. Why is "see" repeated in the last line?
4. One edition shows dashes as the only punctuation mark in the whole poem. How would a dash at the end of each stanza affect the reading of the poem?
5. Do the phonemes in "With blue, uncertain,
20

stumbling buzz" have special relevance in the last stanza?
6. What is the narrator's attitude toward death?
   Toward the fly? Which words especially reveal those attitudes?
7. What lines have ironic implication?

C. Analyze the following stanzas. Two of them form a complete Housman poem; the other stanzas are extraneous and should be crossed out. Clearly mark the poem stanzas to show their chronological arrangement. Explain why you eliminated the stanzas that you did, and discuss why you arranged the other two in that order to form the completed poem. You will be credited for a convincingly supported argument. Include theme, figures of speech, diction, style, tone, or other pertinent Housman characteristics in your answer. Remember that your concern is not to guess the poets, although you may include this information if you recognize a particular poet's style. Your major concern is to show that your selection and arrangement of certain stanzas form a complete poem.

Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

'Tis late to hearken, late to smile,
But better late than never;
I shall have lived a little while
Before I die for ever.

Age saw two quiet children;
He bid them both be happy,
"Be happy, happy, happy,
And seize the day of pleasure."

You smile upon your friend to-day,
To-day his ills are over;
You hearken to the lover's say,
And happy is the lover.
In addition to poetry study, students will learn to integrate thinking, reading, and writing as they distinguish between reports, opinions, inferences, and judgments. Mass media offer examples for discerning students to analyze, and assignments such as writing letters to the editor or writing movie reviews help students recognize their own biases. Also they can express a single opinion and support it while remaining open-minded on a subject; or they can write a persuasive essay gaining at least respect from the chosen audience for a reasonable point of view, if not for a change in action. Since paperbacks, newspapers, advertising, comic books, and magazines exert much influence on society, students will be interested in analyzing the language for stereotypes, slanting, implied judgments, and jargon. Assignments which may prove useful in this area of study can be created from examples in the daily newspaper or from a TV newscast. A Bill Mauldin cartoon may spark a discussion of implied judgments. The recent controversial Spiro Agnew speech in Des Moines may stimulate students to formulate their own definitions of objective reporting. Editorials on the same subjects may be analyzed for their differing points of view.\(^1\) This unit of study has such everyday application that students will be inclined to agree that language has a vital role in society.

Definition and classification are two more rhetorical forms which need to be included in the first half of a freshman composition course. These written assignments work in smoothly with semantic discussions.

\(^{1}\) Grace Wilson suggests numerous mass media assignments in *Composition Situations*. 
of levels of abstraction, stereotypes, and confusion between individual interpretations of concepts (e.g., "moderate income," middle-age"). The student writer goes beyond a mere lexical definition to explain his concept of "pride" or "liberty." He sees a need for discussing the abstract in terms of the concrete, or the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. He recognizes that his definition of freedom may be entirely different from anyone else's, but as long as he stipulates and explicates his exact meaning, the audience will follow. Similarly with classification. The categories the writer uses may be unique, but the audience will understand if he takes care to define his terms. All of this discussion underscores the premise that the writer has something to say, and that if he says it clearly, he will communicate with his reader.

A term paper as part of the work in the second half of the course, or better yet, a series of brief library papers, will help students blend critics' opinions and their own critical views in defense of a given topic. (If careful study of debate reached more students in high school or college, the term paper perhaps could be eliminated from the freshman English course.) Research techniques in the library, discriminatory selection of facts and opinions, and accurate documentation of sources are vital skills for college freshmen.

The term paper will be the climax of the Sioux Falls College composition course. Besides incorporating the techniques of style and precise diction, the term paper encourages the students to use more complex rhetorical forms of organization: a complex opinion with multiple supporting reasons, developed chronologically, inductively,
deductively, or in the order of importance; contrast and comparison; complex persuasion.

A student may decide upon a term paper topic which compares and contrasts the evidences of witchcraft in The Scarlet Letter and The Crucible. (When one of these works is a text in the course and fully discussed in class, the student will not be unduly burdened in writing a paper of this nature.) This assignment calls for a definition of witchcraft, and a thorough analysis of the instances of witchcraft in each work, in addition to a comparison and contrast of Hawthorne's and Miller's uses of witchcraft. Smooth transitions will be needed to move coherently through this material.

Because term papers utilize complex rhetorical forms, it is essential that the students master the simpler forms before trying to write term papers. This is especially true with arranging the material. Chronological order is the easiest and many students will use it often early in the course. Arranging the material in the order of importance is next hardest and here students can go from most important to least important, or vice versa. Deductive and inductive orders are the most difficult, but they are the most effective when the student does them well. One student used three Hemingway short stories to show an autobiographical influence on character development, and she organized the material deductively. The title and controlling purpose of the term paper show the complex opinion which will be supported by multiple reasons:

**HEMINGWAY'S CREATIONS: SHADOWS OF A BIG MAN**

Hemingway drew from the vast wells of his own resources
to create characters brimming with personality by embellishing them with his own enjoyment of life; by endowing upon them his own idiosyncrasies; by instilling within them the fury of his own passions and loves; by creating in them his beliefs on death; and finally, by using the quality of realism in his writings.\(^{12}\)

In addition, the term paper assignment can show how well the student has learned to narrow the topic, make generalizations, support those generalizations, and coherently present the material. Learning how to document quotations and using them as supporting evidence—the major distinguishing factors between a term paper and an ordinary theme assignment—will be the biggest obstacles to freshmen. Several private conferences with the students are necessary in teaching these techniques, after preliminary class discussions of them. Note cards and outlines can be checked in the first few minutes of a conference; but the student profits especially by on-the-spot instruction regarding a few paragraphs of his rough draft. It is here that many documentary problems can be anticipated and eliminated. This close attention to the preliminary stages of the term paper also helps the instructor when he evaluates the finished product, for he can recall the problems which appeared earlier and see how the student has worked them out.

When term paper topics arise from the literature studied in the course, the student has another opportunity to unite his reading, writing, and thinking processes. A novel or a play, or perhaps a group of one author's short stories, makes a suitable primary source

\(^{12}\) Nancy Sandwick, Unpublished, typewritten term paper for Freshman English at Sioux Falls College (South Dakota), May 1966.
for a research paper. Casebooks on various historical and scientific topics may be used to interest students who want to write about their major field of study. This not only helps interest them in doing the English assignment, but also, and more importantly, encourages a transfer of learning. Clear thinking and writing are vital to all fields of study, and the sooner students begin to integrate what they learn in English class with the rest of their lives, the more complete their education will be.

The audience for a term paper is, in general, any literate reader. Therefore, the students will need to employ the highest level of usage and an appropriate tone. Even though the style of the informal essay must be laid aside, many techniques learned in familiar essays must be retained in the term paper assignment; for example, sentence variety and paragraph cohesiveness, subordination and parallelism, definitions, and adequate explanations gain increased significance if the abstract subject or unknown concept is to be made clear.

But in the midst of all the research and organization of the paper, the student must be reminded that all theme assignments (including term papers) are, as Hans P. Guth says, creative writing exercises. The student is not merely showing that he can analyze a process using spatial organization; he must feel that he has something to say, and that this particular form will help him say it best. Also, the student needs to grasp how form fits idea, so he may have to experi-

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ment to find the best presentation. Throughout any writing assignment, the writer must know that he is a creator: he can determine a focus, collect research, and shape his ideas in a unique combination which will never be repeated.
THEME EVALUATION AND REVISION

The freshman composition staff at Sioux Falls College should agree which mechanical, usage, and content errors are gross and would necessitate a failing grade on an individual theme and for the course. Students must be informed specifically of the minimum passing requirements, and the pass-fail grading in all freshman English sections needs to conform to these standards.

Theme evaluation must be more than merely placing a grade on the paper. The instructor should assess the whole paper, including how well the theme fits the assignment, and carefully express his thoughts to the writer. Personal conferences with the student or taped recordings of the instructor's comments are invaluable methods of evaluation; detailed written comments are second best. Never should a theme be marked with only a letter grade.

Since students tend to regard the letter grade highly and disregard the detailed criticism, it is the duty of the instructor to show them where the emphasis lies. Terms such as "Satisfactory," "Poor," "Unacceptable" may be substituted for letter grades, but even these subjective terms do not reveal the specific problems and highlights of a student theme. Before growth and improvement can occur, the student must be aware of the successes and failures within each paragraph, and of the paper as a whole. Although abbreviations and symbols are time-saving devices for the instructor, little is gained if the student does not understand their meanings. When a personal conference to evaluate the theme is not possible, the instructor owes
the student a detailed written explanation.

Revision will be a part of all theme assignments (including the term paper). A short time lapse between the assignment of the theme and the evaluation and revision of the theme makes for the best learning situation. The revision is not recopying the theme, deleting the problem paragraphs and supplying a few commas. Revision—if it is not busywork—demands that the student (1) analyze the teacher's comments; (2) study the rules he has broken; (3) experiment with several ways of rewriting his sentences and paragraphs; (4) add material for clarity. Sometimes it is desirable to ask the student to revise an entire paper, although revision of selected portions of the paper may suffice. Ideally a student will learn from his revision and will not repeat the same errors in succeeding themes; but this result will occur only when the student regards revision as a part of the total theme assignment and seriously devotes time to evaluating his strengths and improving his weaknesses. This self-awareness will produce a writer who criticizes his own work before he submits it to the audience or the instructor.

This, then, is the ultimate goal of revision.
CONCLUSION

Numerous freshman English courses exist in the United States, and many good points are evident in them. However, this proposed course for a liberal arts college attempts to combine the advantages of existing approaches for a unified attainment of reading, writing, and thinking objectives. Too often the freshman course objectives are separated into small units which never coalesce in the students' minds. Although the objectives of this course are presented in nine divisions, the writer has correlated language, style, and rhetoric in each group of three divisions. Also, the reading and writing assignments, plus the class discussions, integrate clear thinking with critical reading and exact writing.

While other composition programs may have this same goal, this writer has included some methods of implementing the integration of skills to help insure achievement of the goal. Sometimes English teachers are too busy (or lack motivation or imagination) to create assignments and to lead discussions which fulfill more than one immediate purpose. Or, sometimes a problem arises when too few integrated exercises and discussions are presented throughout the year. Unfortunately, some teachers fail to realize that students do not readily associate and transfer ideas from one assignment to another—or from one class to another, or from the classroom into society. The suggestions in this paper are intended to establish an integrated freshman composition course which can help develop well-rounded, educated men and women.
SAMPLE THEME ASSIGNMENTS

For Divisions I., II., III. in the Calendar of Objectives (p. 7)

1. Choose one aspect of liberal education which has recently stimulated your thinking. Define it as you presently understand it using three kinds of definition, including one of the operational definitions. Cite examples from Montaigne's "Essay on the Education of Children," or other pertinent essays, and appropriate personal experiences. Remember to limit yourself to one facet of liberal education (such as the foreign language requirement) so that your remarks will be fully developed in 300 to 400 words. Address your comments to your peers who are formulating their own philosophies of liberal education.

2. Write a theme from 500 to 800 words long. It should be a summary narrative. Show how you became aware of a truth about yourself. Carefully analyze your feelings and actions over the days, months, or years and show the change in attitude occurring. Perhaps you will want to discuss your true meaning of Christmas, your opposition to the opposite sex, your tenderheartedness toward pets, or your increasing interest in reading books. The change you show need not be a complete reversal; an increase or decrease in intensity is enough. To maintain interest and to give adequate supportive details, include two (or more) one-time, one-place narratives within the summary narration. Direct your remarks to a close friend or member of your family; you may write a personal letter if you desire.

3. A story can hold the reader's interest in a number of ways:
through suspense; through interesting characters; through the ideas in it; through familiar action; through unusual, wondrous action. Sometimes the technique of "foreshadowing" is used to prepare the reader for things to come and to draw him toward them. Classify the techniques Conrad uses to hold your interest in Youth or Typhoon. (Before you condemn a story as dull, it is wise to find out whether the author is to blame, or the reader. To a dull reader, all stories are dull!) You may use the above categories or create your own. Carefully define your classifying principle to the audience. Assume that the audience is this class. Do not tell the plot, but do refer to specific instances to show your understanding and to clarify your remarks.

Since this is an in-class assignment, 300 to 400 words will suffice. Remember, it is better to limit yourself to two or three categories and adequately develop them than to treat superficially many categories. For Divisions IV, V, VI, in the Calendar of Objectives (pp. 7-8)

1. Select a quotation, or simply a judgment, from Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." Agree with it, disagree with it, or modify it. Use examples from contemporary issues as well as ones from your personal experiences to support your stance. For example, taking Thoreau's concern for citizens who resign their consciences to legislators, explain how you think Thoreau would have responded to (or voted in) the Iowa Legislature on the proposed abortion law last week.

In 300 to 500 words you should be able to clearly express and support your views. You will have forty minutes to plan and write this paper; allow ten minutes to proofread your work. Your audience is this class.
2. As a college freshman, you should be forming some definite opinions on local issues. Decide whether you are in favor of or against the continuation of Daylight Savings Time in South Dakota. Write two essays urging the citizens of the state to vote in the November election according to your belief; one essay should be directed to the farmers in the rural part of the state, the other to the Chamber of Commerce members in Sioux Falls or Rapid City. Each essay should carefully analyze the issue and give supporting examples. For each theme 300 to 400 words ought to be sufficient.

3. Write 400 to 600 words revealing your understanding of the Hemingway short stories we have read. (Enclose titles of short stories in quotation marks.) Clarity and interest may be achieved by use of specific examples from Hemingway and from your personal experiences.

Assume that this class is your audience. You may wish to persuade them to read more of Hemingway because of his fascinating style. Or you may wish to handle this as a cause-effect assignment. Another purpose could be to support your single opinion with multiple reasons. In a note on the back of page 1, state your intended purpose.

Discuss Hemingway's style. Limit yourself to a couple of aspects. Does he use big or little words? Abstract or concrete words? Are his sentences usually simple or complex? Can you describe his dialogue method? How does he use rhythm and repetition? Why would high school students choose Hemingway's short stories to transform into plays? Why is Hemingway's style popular with parodists? How are transitions handled? As you can see, it is essential to limit your topic.
4. Write 250 to 400 words for an audience of your high school classmates who did not go to college. Narrow your topic so that you can define the key terms; support your assertions; use concrete and specific support grounded in personal experience. In this paper your purpose is to explain and analyze a cause-effect relationship. This problem is allied with defining, since to understand an effect we must do more than merely label its various causes. But we must go beyond mere extended definition. For example, a teacher is notoriously unsuccessful in working with young people, and we explain this inability by saying he is "unsympathetic" or "lacks understanding" despite his knowledge of the field. These abstract terms must be defined and illustrated before we can establish the logical relationships between the effect and the cause(s).

Select as your subject, then, one of the "effects" listed below. Your purpose is to explain the cause or causes of the chosen effect. Do not try to offer solutions (or changes) since that will make the topic too broad. You will analyze and present what produces or contributes to:

a. Respect (or lack of respect) for authority
b. Popularity
c. Success (or failure)
d. Stage fright
e. Littering

For Divisions VII., VIII., IX. in the Calendar of Objectives (p. 8)

1. Analyze Macbeth structurally. Define the theme of the tragedy. Then analyze each act for its contribution to the unified whole. How do the parts (the acts) interact with each other? (Remember, the division into acts is a modern addition to the play.) The paper should be about
Assume that the audience is this class, and that they are familiar with the play; therefore, do not tell the plot. You may wish to make this a comparison and contrast assignment, or a complex opinion with multiple supporting reasons.

2. Demonstrate your understanding of Death of a Salesman in a 500 to 700-word essay. Assume that the audience for whom you are writing disagrees with your position. Write persuasively, not necessarily to change their minds, but to convince them of the validity of your stance. Support your generalizations with specifics from the play or from your own personal experiences.

Contrast Biff and Bernard as adolescents and adults. To what extent are they reflections of their fathers? Are they believable?

3. What is the revolt of the American conscience which Allen outlines in The Big Change? In defining each of the elements of the revolt, arrange the supporting material in different orders: chronological, most-to-least important, inductive, or deductive. What parallels can you draw between the happenings of the early 20th century and the events of the 1960's? Your purpose is to persuade the audience of the validity of the parallels you cite. Assume that your audience is composed of freshmen at another Midwestern college who have not necessarily read The Big Change. Your paper should be approximately 800 words long.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Numerous works were read, but only those substantial sources which proved most helpful in formulating the proposed course of study have been listed here.


Wilson, Grace E. *Composition Situations*. Champaign, Ill. 1966.

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