

Before a practiced writer begins a sentence, he has—or feels that he has—almost an infinite number of ways of saying what he has to say. But with each word he writes down, the field of choices narrows. The sentence seems to take its head and move with increasing predictability in the directions that idiom, syntax, and semantics leave open. The experienced writer responds to these constraints unconsciously, providing the words or structures that different contexts allow. He may have to struggle at times to write himself out of a syntactic or semantic corner of his own creation, but the sense of what he can and cannot do within the limits of the several codes that govern writing is certain. He struggles for aptness and meaning, not merely correctness. Syntax, for him, is largely a concern of style.

BW students at the beginning of their apprenticeship seldom enjoy this kind of ease with formal written sentences. For them, as for the foreign-language student, the question is rarely "How can I make this sentence better?" but "How can I make this sentence right?" Their concern is with the syntax of competence, not of style, for they lack a sure sense of what the written code will allow. Much of this uneasiness,

1. I do not use the term *competence* here in the specialized sense of a competence/performance distinction where *competence* refers to what the student knows unconsciously about the underlying rules of the language and *performance* refers to what the student actually says or writes. I am thinking, rather, of competence in the general sense of performing correctly.

for the native speaker at least, can be blamed on the writing process itself, which, because it involves different coordinations from those of speech, creates a code-consciousness that can inhibit the writer from doing what he is in fact able to do in the more spontaneous situation of talk. But it is difficult to explain all his syntactical difficulties as accidents rather than as signs of his unfamiliarity with certain features of the code that governs formal written English.

This unfamiliarity with what might be called the dialect of formal writing leads some writers to affect the style without having mastered it. The result is an unconscious parody of that style, often a grotesque mixture of rudimentary errors, formal jargon, and strained syntax:

- ... a young person could get an increase his knowledge about the world  
 Note here and in other sentences how the writer nominalizes his real verb in his effort to assume a formal style. As a speaker he would more likely have said, "A young person could learn more about the world."
- His ability to cope with people around him will be on a better basis. (He will cope better with other people.)
- Most of the more demanding jobs have many people at which their financial status is very low or about average. (The jobs that are easy to get don't pay much.)
- According to this statement which projects there are more jobs available without college, was very obvious to me before enrolling. (I knew before enrolling that there were more jobs for high-school graduates than for college graduates.)
- Although it is true from the information provided that most job opening would pertain to a nonprofessional level. (... most job openings are for non-professionals.)
- However, I don't believe that a student would determine whether or not he will to attend college chiefly on the basis of financial, but that of the importance of obtaining a qualified educational background, and the services he could be to his fellow men. (A student shouldn't go to college in order to earn more money but to learn more and help others.)
- On the point assumed that infants have quality for excepting beauty more intellectual than grownups I fell are really true.
- In this ever more confusing world its my opinion that only the basic teaching are truly necessary for the child who will someday intermanhood, because most of his learnings will be done by his teachings

and from that launch [launch] pad we pressure [pursue] his on [own] life liberty and happiness and in doing so put forth his greatest efforts.

Other writers, while they attempt no imitation of a mode they have not mastered, exceed the limits of their ability as writers in the effort to articulate a mature or subtle thought. In the following passage, for example, the writer has a complex thought to communicate and he holds on to it throughout the passage. Yet one senses the struggle he is having to articulate through the written medium:

Not too many people achieve their degree in these fields so therefore you can say that, in a way they are an abundance of jobs for them, though if they are the jobs least demanded by. As in contrast to the jobs most demanding it is because as I mentioned before if the quality of knowledge obtained and so forth. In comparing the status the persons with degrees in the least job demand would be highly regarded then to that if a person with the form of a job which was most demanding.

Note the difficulties the writer has with the forms for comparison and his consequent reluctance to depart from the wording of the essay question (*jobs in least demand*), which commits him to using these forms (*jobs least demanded by, as in contrast to, degrees in the least job demand, then to that, etc.*). Yet the idea he wants to articulate is both perceptive and complex:

Not many people get college degrees. Those who do get their degrees have a chance to get the best jobs. Therefore, even though there are relatively few openings for good jobs, the number who qualify for them is also small. You could say, then, that people with degrees have an abundance of jobs to choose from. Furthermore, because the jobs that are easy to get require less knowledge, they also give less status.

In trying to analyze the difficulties that beset a writer of such a passage, a teacher is likely to find the familiar categories for classifying writing problems unsatisfactory. If syntax is understood to be a system for indicating the relationships between words in sentences, then almost any error except perhaps some misspellings reflects in some sense a syntactic problem. A comma splice, for example, misrepresents the grammatical independence of two sentences; a missing inflection creates an ambiguous relationship between a word and some other part of the sentence; even a carelessly omitted word can produce a major syntactic derailment. Yet it is important in helping a student master formal written English to try to classify the kinds of problems he has so that

one can design lessons that meet his needs. This chapter is largely an effort to classify the syntactic problems noted in the placement essays of 4,000 BW students who ranked, as writers, in the bottom quarter of their freshman class. Two large categories of error emerged from this analysis: I called one *syntactic errors* and the other *common errors*. The latter category, which is discussed in the following chapter, covered most of the inflectional errors that trouble BW students. The *syntactic errors* were then organized under the following very general headings:

#### Accidental Errors

##### Blurred Patterns

##### Consolidation Errors

##### Coordinate Consolidations

##### Subordinate Consolidations

##### Juxtaposition Consolidations

##### Inversions

These errors are described and illustrated in the following pages. In the last part of the chapter, I suggest ways that teachers might approach these difficulties with syntax.

#### Accidental errors

*Syntax* is generally, and loosely, used by teachers to mean the "big" problems in sentences—problems that keep a sentence from "working" or being understood as opposed to those that keep it from being appropriate to a specific situation (e.g. the double negative, while appropriate in some dialects and colloquial styles, is inappropriate in formal or erudite English). Some of the errors that seem to fit this category of syntax can, however, be quickly remedied by a reader who, upon perceiving that a sentence is not working, makes the needed repairs in his own mind and moves on. Nonetheless, the errors are disrupting, especially when an erroneous form sets up different syntactic constraints from the ones the writer is obeying. The erroneous use of *my* for *by* in the following sentence, for example, creates structural expectations that never develop:

I feel that my extending their education it will provide with knowledge, so when they have got to make a decision they can think carefully and consider more than one viewpoint.

My leads the reader to expect a gerund subject for the clause "that my extending . . ." whereas the writer intends an adverbial structure, "by extending their education it will . . ."

Here are more errors of the same type:

- Life is really hard today so you can imagine what it will  in the coming future and for us generation. (our)
- But if they do they would  much more stable be ready to face the world. (be)
- They you realize that we probably went on to higher education to achieve this position that he has obtained. (then)
- Everyone should go to college even if they don't get a degree at  they can have a little more education. (least)
- Young people should go to college because you  get along in the world unless you have a good education. (can't)
- No  should never think in turns of only this country. (one)
- I probably feel lost without  I suppose I'll miss  for quiet awhile. (it)
- I still  a person coming out of high school who wants to go to college should still go . . . (think)
- The majority of these job, one needs professional skills, in order to obtain the job. (for)
- A child possessing no feeling  hate could be taught to hate and have prejudice. (of)
- In the eyes on the person without a college degree  is wrong. (of) (this)

While skips and misses of this sort are often dense in BW papers, it is difficult to see a pattern to them. Generally they involve small words; sometimes they involve words that are known to be troublesome to many BW students (*be*, for example, or a modal auxiliary like *must* or *can*). Yet they are the kinds of errors that the writers usually catch themselves once they see them (not an easy skill for a beginning writer, who tends to see what he means rather than what he writes). Thus they are often syntactic errors that reflect a need for more efficient proofreading but not necessarily for lessons in sentence structure. Once again we are reminded that a student's inexperience with the physical

act of writing affects not only his handwriting but his facility and efficiency with sentences themselves.

#### Blurred patterns

One of the difficulties in getting at syntactic problems (and perhaps one of the reasons for the broad use of the term for almost anything that goes wrong in a sentence) is that while some problems can be identified as problems attached to specific words or structures the writer is unaccustomed to using or writing and therefore needs to practice, many others occur in such a wide range of situations that a teacher despairs of taking them up one by one. (The student who is the victim of such an approach generally leaves the course believing that there is no end to the making and correcting of errors.) The problem of word skips and misses is such a problem: the difficulty is not so much in the specific words that get skipped as in the writer's failure to perceive skips on pages he has written; but once he can objectify his own page the errors disappear with dramatic speed since he already has criteria for correctness that he can trust. But where his criteria are not stable, and where there are no useful generalizations to be made that will cover many instances (as there are in areas like subject-verb agreement or pronoun case, which are not matters of idiom but of rules), he must either work on the errors as discrete problems or depend upon a less conscious acquisition of the correct forms through regular exposure to them in talk and reading.

This kind of problem is best illustrated in the following examples of *blurred patterns*, that is, of patterns that erroneously combine features from several patterns, creating a kind of syntactic dissonance:

- Statistics show that *on the average person* a high school diploma in a lifetime is worth about one hundred thousand dollars more than a person who has no diploma. Several forms are blurred here: *on the average, a person . . . ; for the average person, a high-school . . .* Had the writer begun with the first option the form would have delivered to him the right subject for carrying off the comparison, which is not between a high-school diploma and a person, but between a person and a person.
- If they [jobs] decrease in a great number *At least I can say* is that I will have a college degree. Blurred forms:

At least I can say that . . .  
The least I can say is . . .

- I feel that if I had to go on to college instead of to work as I did I would be *more capable* to simply communicate to my fellow employers . . .

Blurred forms:  
more able to communicate

more capable of communicating

- If a person feels that *by getting a college degree* would make him a better person although the jobs to fit his education might not be in demand of course it makes sense.

Blurred forms:

If a person feels that getting a college degree would . . .  
If a person feels that by getting a college degree he would . . .

- I am also inclined to agree with the High School student because *no one makes but you* makes yourself successful.

Blurred forms:

No one but you makes . . .

- By going to college a young person could *get an increase his knowledge* about the world he lived in.

Blurred forms:

could get an increase in . . .  
could increase his knowledge

- I do not think that there is anything to worry about* the jobs that are taught by colleagues and are not in demand.

Blurred forms:

I do not think there is anything to worry about.

- To take speedwriting* you must go to a business school *for*.

Blurred forms:

To take speedwriting you must go to a business school.

- You must go to a business school for speedwriting.

- You would be *most likely* get a better education.

Blurred forms:

You would most likely get . . .

You would be most likely to get . . .

One cannot assume that all blurred patterns of the kind illustrated above are patterns that the writer does not know or has never produced, especially in speech. Some of the blurs can be blamed, as word skips and misses usually are, on the manual process of writing, that is, on the ease with which the hand moves into familiar albeit unintentional patterns, especially when one pattern contains many of the same words or letters as another. But in other patterns where one form is

more familiar than the other (as at least *I can say* is more familiar than *the least I can say*), the problem of interference is more complex and more difficult to get at by direct instruction.

### Consolidation errors

Without a better understanding than we now have of the spoken language of the young men and women who are classified as basic writers and of the differences between written and spoken language, we cannot determine with accuracy what the students already know but cannot put into practice because of their stiffness or hesitancy with the medium of writing and what they do not know, or seldom use, and must in some way learn as part of the "dialect" of written formal English. If one is led by the kinds of errors that seem to dominate the writing of BW students, this much at least might be ventured: that while many of their problems with written English are obviously linked to the accidents of transcription in an unfamiliar medium, others seem to be rooted in real differences between spoken and written sentences, differences that are exaggerated when the writer's own speech is non-standard but are there for the standard speaker as well.

The differences arise, mainly, from the degree of consolidation each form of expression allows. Speech is more likely to follow normal word order and to tolerate a high level of redundancy and loose coordination. It is perfected in the dynamics of dialogue, not at the point of utterance. Writing, however, withholds utterance in order to perfect it. And "perfecting" in writing has much to do with the ability to consolidate sentences—that is, to subordinate, syntactically, some elements of an idea or statement to others and to conjoin other elements that are clearly of equal semantic weight.

Thus the attempts of students to consolidate sentences, even though the attempts lead to ungrammaticality, may show a responsiveness to the writing situation that should be encouraged and not checked by a permanent retreat into simple sentences where the subject always comes first and every possibility for subordination is lost. Students often complain about the gap between the "easy" sentences in their workbooks and the complicated ones they encounter in reading or that they generate in their writing, sentences they seem to need in order to express their meaning or pursue their thoughts but sentences that are difficult to manage without more experience with writing.

That the impulse to consolidate often exceeds the ability to do so is apparent in many of the sentences BW students write.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the writer, in his effort (or hurry) to compress, leaves out a vital part of his statement:

□ The most disadvantage and disappointment is *knowing and hoping* that somehow the field which one chose does not have an opening after college.

Here the writer intends to speak of two feelings—a feeling of disappointment at discovering that even with a college education there is no job and a feeling of hope that there will be a job. The gerund *knowing* needs to be completed by one clause (that the field does not have an opening); the gerund *hoping* by another (that there will be a job). Thus the consolidation the writer attempts by yoking *knowing* and *hoping* and then attaching them to the same complement cancels out his meaning.

□ In High School you learn a lot for example Kindergarten which I took up in High School.

If the writer had written a second sentence rather than compressed the two points into one, the meaning would have survived: In high school you learn a lot. For example, I took up the study of kindergarten in high school.

□ Presently due to the wage freeze and high unemployment, job are hard to find weather college graduate or not.

The omission here of a clause (whether a person is a *college graduate* or not) makes *college graduate* a kind of job.

□ At this young age, children are always asking question. Depending on the answers the child will get thus creating his bias and prejudices.

Here the writer compresses two participial constructions into service as a sentence. The idea he seems to want to express requires a structure that will allow him, within a single predication, to say that one condition will produce one kind of result and another will produce another. The writer chooses the right structure (*depending on the answers he will get*) but does not carry through with it (*the child will turn out to be prejudiced or tolerant*).

□ In my opinion the parents have to be more leaning [lenient] with their children, to be free to express their opinions and thoughts.

The infinitive structure is mistakenly attached to *parents* because of the omission of an adverbial clause after *children* (so that the children can be free . . .).

□ Although some people don't realize the pressures that are put upon a person when he is in school, then comes out graduating and cannot get a better job.

2. This is not to say, of course, that writers at this level do not also miss many opportunities for consolidation, as we have seen in the *and* and *but* chains illustrated in the preceding chapter.

A dependent clause (*although some people . . . school*) is joined here to the second half of a compound verb (the first half is missing, as is the independent clause). *Although some people don't realize it, pressures are put upon a person when he is in school. Then he comes out after graduating and cannot get a better job.*

Occasionally the writer simply abandons the task of consolidation, as this writer does in his effort to summarize within one sentence the stages of a child's life:

The main point of this paragraph is to show how a child is so sensitive in his/her first years of life and how life goes along throughout the year, after being a child, and what come after. education etc.

At other times he seems to allow subordinate structures to tumble out on the page, obliging the reader to sort them out:

But many colleges have night classes so you could have worked and gone to college also pay for your education although some other programs to help pay on some where you don't pay or some where you don't pay at all so you were lazy.

(A person who wants to go to college but thinks he can't afford it has several choices: he can work and go to school in the evening; get help through some program; go to a free-tuition college. A person who doesn't go to college therefore is lazy, not deprived.)

And sometimes his stylistic stance lands him in syntactic situations that even a more experienced writer would have trouble with. Under the spell of a language he has read but not always understood or listened to and not often used, he begins his sentence with a structure he is not at home with and with formal-sounding words that are less precise than those he has easy access to:

Although it is true from the information provided that most job opening would pertain to a non-professional level, it is not for the amount of jobs that are to be available in the coming years to determine the amount of graduated high school student that should go on for a college degree, but to the individual that is seeking a higher degree of education in a field of his own interest.

The writer's choice of the unusual pattern "It is not for X to determine Y" gets him into a complex parallel arrangement that breaks down in the second clause. One suspects, further, that the selection of this pattern was encouraged by the tone of the opening clause with its awkward structure (*it is true from the information provided that . . .*) and its stiff vocabulary (*information provided, pertain to*). With more con-

vidence, the writer might have trusted his real intuitions and headed his sentences more directly toward his meaning:

True, most job openings will be in non-professional fields. But the number of job openings should not determine who goes on to college. If a person wants an education in a particular field, he should get it.

#### Coordinate consolidations

Sentences being the infinitely various creations they are, a teacher can not hope to "cover" all the syntactically disorienting patterns an inexperienced writer might generate as he writes. It is possible, however, to generalize about some of these situations, for they arise frequently in the writing of BW students and are usually fundamental to the skill of consolidating sentences. Where, for example, a person has had little practice in articulating, formally, the relationships between sentences or between the parts of sentences, he is likely to depend in his writing upon a few all-purpose connectors like *and* or *but* or to use other means, such as juxtaposition, to express relationships. We have encountered before, in the chapter on punctuation, the linking *and's* and *but's* which serve to sustain the flow of sentences, even as they flatten the possibilities for subordination:

You are told "wait" we'll get in touch with you" but by the tone of voice you know you'll never hear from them but after the first time you don't lose hope but when it has happened quite a few times you do. So you say to yourself maybe I should have gone to college but then not many colleges train you for such posts but some do I could have found one.

Coordinating conjunctions can also be used, however, to coordinate smaller units than sentences, and it is here that they serve to consolidate rather than merely link sentences. Thus the two sentences below can be consolidated without any loss of meaning:

They believe they can become leaders in their field.  
They believe they can get good secure jobs.  
They believe they can become leaders in their field and get good secure jobs.

But this transformation involves the grafting of part of one sentence onto another, an adaptation that results in a syntactic derailment when the writer does not observe the grammatical constraint the *and* places upon his sentence. Thus, for example, he writes:

They believe they can become leaders in their field and a good secure job.

The writer begins the parallel structure with *leaders*, the complement of *become*. In doing so, he is constrained to provide another sentence, another verb, or another animate noun that will fit into the concept of people in general becoming certain kinds of people (*leaders*, *well-paid professionals*, etc.). His real intention, however, appears to have been to mention two things people think they can do once they are educated—become leaders and get secure jobs. Grammatically, in other words, the meaning required a compounding of verbs, not complements.

The problem with symmetrical constructions, of course, is that the boundaries of the symmetry are moveable. *And* can compound almost anything, and only by swift grammatical intuitions does a writer know what kind of boundary he is setting for himself. Even experienced writers find it necessary to scrutinize their sentences for broken parallels, and those special structures, such as *not only . . . but also*, which serve to hold elaborate coordinations, almost always demand a second look. These are balancing acts that, once again, point up the difference between spontaneous speech and the wrought language of the page. No wonder that inexperienced writers have difficulty with them.

Among BW students, parallels are often broken at the point where the verb enters (or ought to enter) a construction:

- I agree on the fact that a father should share his son's experience and to help him when he is in need.
- Boys and girls should see and hear so that nothing can come as a shock or be flabbergasted.
- People are interested in better thing in just listen to poetry or reading poetry.
- I have found more enjoyment in just seeing something I didn't know, than to just going around labling everything I seen.
- No one can go through life just listening to thing and and they never really understanding what it means.

Lists are also common sites for broken coordination:

- Good positions are only open to the one that have the ability of a leader, understanding of your fellow workers, and furthermore, to invent or to improve the working standards of one's company.
- Parent positive thinking come when they tell you to get a haircut, a job, who raise you, and don't tell you know who the mother.

- Also people are taught the beauty of flowers, and animals, and to listen for sounds of nature.
- Their ages, many things have change. Like for instance clothing styles, hair-do styles and most of all, the way people think, act and present themselves *have changed a great deal*.  
Note in the above example that the list which ends one predication interlocks with the next predication and becomes its subject.

That clauses, those familiar heralds of tangled syntax, often break up coordinate structures:

- I don't believe that a student should determine whether or not he will to attend college chiefly on the basis of financial, but that of the importance of obtaining a qualified educational background.
- I agree with the paragraph because it really gives the right opinions of infants and of their daily thoughts, which goes along inside them, and that it is right for the present to teach them more.
- . . . a job where I could meet people and help people and at the same time that something new happen every day.

Not only . . . but also structures usually go awry:

- This clearly not only makes it a disadvantage when competing with college students or grad, but also increasing disadvantaged to the student who holds a regular high school diploma.
- Students attending college are not only benefiting themselves but it will eventually benefit the community in which they live.

Even more difficult to balance are structures of comparison, where elements that are grammatically balanced are semantically unbalanced (that is, where one element has more of the quality or thing than the other). The language provides a number of forms for managing comparisons, but inexperienced writers are not always at ease with them, as the following sentences indicate:

- When you do graduate from college with a degree your chances of getting the job you want is increased enormously *than that* of a high school student.  
(your chances are increased over those . . .  
your chances are better than those of . . .  
you have a better chance than a high-school student has of . . .)
- In my opinion a employer would more readily accept a college graduate *quicker than* a high school graduate.  
Redundant form.

- So they may wind up taking the *same* job a non-college graduate. (same job as a non-college graduate  
same job a non-college graduate would take)
- Our society is changing *then* it ever has.
- The employer wants someone with the most experience and skill *than* of one who just started.
- I feel it does make sense for a young person getting out of high school today to go on for a college degree, because where there are *the least demands* that people can follow up on something *that there are more* demands in the fields of experiates.

But difficulties with comparisons lie deeper than idiom. The writer must have in mind a point on which his comparison is based. Then he must show how the elements of his comparison differ in their relation-ship to that point. If he names the two elements in his comparison (which might be natural to do since they are both on his mind as subjects), he cannot pursue the comparison easily in that sentence because the verb then serves both members of the comparison. In the following sentence, for example, a writer struggles several times to make the predicate serve his comparison, but each time, he can get it to serve only the second part of that comparison:

*First try*

The life that my parents led and the life that I am going to lead will reflect the opposite of them trying to maintain an image on the block.

*Second try*

The life that my parents led and the life I am going to lead is the opposite of their struggle.

*Third try*

The life of my parents and the life I am going to lead will be the opposite of their life styles.

The writer is in trouble here for at least two reasons: his compound subject prohibits him from doing more than saying that his parents' life and his are different; the past tense in the first restrictive clause (*that my parents led*) and the future progressive tense of the second (*that I am going to lead*) set up a tense disagreement that cannot be resolved in the main verb.

When, however, a writer splits up his comparison, he is likely to

lose one member or to introduce a new member that derails the comparison:

- I think that the main point of this paragraph is the in-born knowledge of an infant to an adult.  
The comparison should be between a child's kind of knowledge and an adult's kind, but the second member is lost.
- Statistics show that on the average person a high school diploma in a lifetime is worth about one hundred thousand dollars more than a person who has no diploma.

The writer intends to compare people with diplomas and people without diplomas, but he compares a high-school diploma with a person.

#### Subordinate consolidations

Coordination allows a writer to double sentence parts rather than whole sentences. It creates parallel structures which, while they make sentences more compact and simpler to understand, pose delicate problems for the writer, who must maintain the syntactic flow of one sentence as he introduces an element from another. This is especially difficult to do when a writer has written himself into an awkward sentence that makes the task of coordination even more complicated than it need be. (It is indeed hard, as we have already noted, to know just how much of the syntactic difficulty at this and other levels of student writing is rooted *not* in a writer's unfamiliarity with basic syntactic structures but in his attempt to use these structures in the formal register of textbooks and teachers, an attempt that often leads him into a wilderness of syntactic options with but a blurred sense of where he wants to go.)

Like coordination, subordination requires that the writer add parts to his base sentence. These additions, however, serve different purposes—either to qualify some element of the sentence, as an adjective or adverb might do, or to fill in (and fill out) the spots that a noun might occupy as subject, complement, or object of a preposition (appositional structures rarely occur at this stage). These consolidations require several things of the writer. If the dependent unit comes first in the sentence, the writer must suspend the independent unit in his mind while he qualifies it (as with introductory adverbial phrases and clauses). If the dependent unit comes between the subject and predicate of the base sentence (as with a relative clause after the subject), the writer must hold the main subject in his mind while he writes out the subject and predicate of the qualifying clause, and then he must return to the predicate of the base

sentence. These operations require a memory for written words and grammatical structures that the inexperienced writer may not have. He hears what he says easily enough, but he does not as easily recall what he has written once his hand has moved on to another part of the sentence, and unlike the experienced writer, he is not in the habit of reviewing what he has written but instead moves headlong, as a speaker might, toward the open line, often forgetting the constraints he has set for himself a few words back. This difficulty with "hearing" what has been written leads to bewildering and grammatically unworkable sentences that belie the writer's skill with the language.

Usually such derailments occur at or near the junctions where subordinate and independent structures intersect. *Introductory adverbial elements*, for example, often cause the writer to lose his subject, or to think that he has already provided one:

- Even if a person graduated from high school who is going on to college to obtain a specific position in his career should first know how much in demand his possible future job really is.
- If he doesn't because the U.S. Labor Department says their wouldn't be enough jobs opened, is a waste to society and a "cop-out" to humanity.
- According to the list of jobs, you are basing whether or not to go to college, is a limited list.
- For those people who do not want an education, but only a job, should go on to a training course.
- There may be a higher percentage of low paid and unskilled job openings and with young students getting out of high school feel they need fast cash they accept these jobs.
- Whereas if they continue their education and still get into a field they are not satisfied with at least have the advancement to work there a year or so and move on to better positions.
- As Dibs was in the beginning of the story would make it very hard for me to picture it as being myself.
- By doing this is by education and with an education your able to choose the job you want.

Ruptured as these sentences are, some of them could be returned to grammaticality simply by the removal of the adverbial term, as the revisions below demonstrate.



Even if a person graduated from high school who is going on to college to obtain a specific position in his career should first know . . . For those people who do not want an education but only a job should go on a training course.

. . . with young students getting out of high school feel they need fast cash . . .

A few of the sentences, it is true, need more extensive repair, but all of them suggest that for an inexperienced writer the adverbial nuance, carried usually by a small word, tends to be obliterated or dimmed as the writer moves into his sentence. Often he seems to "hear" the subject supplying another one. This fading of the introductory adverbial element may also explain why the same writers produce so many redundant adverbial structures.

A writer, for example, might use a redundant coordinating conjunction right after an adverbial clause:<sup>3</sup>

*Even though* colleges do not train people for some jobs that are in demand, *but* they train people for other important jobs without which a society would find it difficult to exist.

*Although* the U.S. Labor Department expects about 2.8 million jobs to open up each year during the mid-1970's, *but* the jobs that are going to be in most demand are for the most part, the jobs that colleges train people for.

Often the infinitive phrase that functions as an adverbial structure is reinforced at the end of a sentence by an *if* clause:

*But to become good* in anything I think you just have to work at it if you wish to achieve in a certain profession.

Or even more frequently, adverbial clauses pile up within a sentence, creating, if not a derailment, at least a disorienting sensation that the sentence is traveling on several tracks at the same time:

*With the rise in the cost of living in order to get a good education* it will cost much more than it does at the present.

*If this was true* I wouldn't be going to college myself, *if they couldn't train me for the career I wanted*.

3. Another possible explanation is that the writer feels a need for a balance of adverbial signals in both the dependent and independent clauses and therefore perceives the doubling of adverbs as a form of concord rather than as a redundancy.

All of the jobs that is kind of important don't have a good rating, like mechanics and repairmen, *when your car or television break* without them you would have to buy a new one *anytime something happens* to it.

This is the reason I think that young people should go to college *because you [can't] get along in the world* unless you have a good education *so that you can have a good and better job*.

As these disjunctures and redundancies demonstrate, subordinate structures do not guarantee consolidation. Introductory adverbial elements may as easily crowd out the subject or generate superfluous adverbial modifiers at the other end of a sentence. In other situations, *relative clauses*, which ought to link nouns to their modifiers, may in fact loosen or even derail sentences. And noun clauses pile up in ways that obfuscate rather than clarify sentence structure. *That* clauses are especially troublesome, whether they function as relative clauses or noun clauses. Like the coordinating conjunctions *and* and *but*, they too easily become grammatical fillers that blur rather than sharpen relationships, as these sentences illustrate:

*Maybe* if ones parents would have explained to them, as children that their is a time in everyone's life that you must make your own decisions and not try to get it from the next person, that maybe fewer of us would have been less weaker in trying to go through life in another persons shoulder. I am just proud to say, that I happen to be quite fortunate, that I consider myself one of the stronger humans in this weak world today.

If he or she feels that they would prefer going to college to take a course and major in something that has any doubt about whether or not they will be employed in the field that they have chosen then they should.

Then again there are more jobs of which I'm sure of that are going down in demand that you can choose of.

The US Labor Department show us that the highest number of openings will occur in fields that colleges do not train people for, does not stop my opinion that any person that wants to get a higher education should do so.

A closer look at these proliferations reveals that although *that* is frequently used, it is not accurately or, at times, correctly used. Often it blurs the relationship between clauses:

- Maybe if ones parents would have explained to them, as children that their is a time in everyone's life that [when] . . .
- I am just proud to say that I happen to be quite fortunate, that [because] . . .
- If he or she feels that they would prefer going to college to take a course and major in something that [but] has any doubts about . . .
- . . . does not stop my opinion, that any person that [who].

Often it is grammatically inappropriate:

- Maybe if ones parents would have explained to them . . . that you must make your own decision and not try to get it from the next person, *that* maybe fewer of us would . . .

Or it is missing where it is grammatically needed, as in this sentence where the opening independent clause must be made into a *that* clause if the verb *does* is to have a subject:

[the fact that] the U.S. Labor Department shows us that the highest number of openings will occur in fields that colleges do not trained people for, does not stop my opinion . . .

To make matters more difficult, inexperienced writers tend to begin their sentences with fillers such as "I think that . . ." or "It is my opinion that . . ." the very structures that keep them from making a strong start with a real subject. Thus the writer who wants to say that a high school graduate doesn't need a degree entangles himself in a sentence like this:

I think that a person who graduates from High School, is not necessary to get a degree.

Grammatically, he has reduced his central statement to a noun clause that serves as direct object to the filler *I think*, and in the process, he has lost his bearings. It happens often:

- In my opinion I believe that you there is no field that cannot be effected some sort of advancement that one maybe need a college degree to make it.

4. Some would argue, however, that inexperienced writers need the *I* to convey a stance or point of view and that these *I* thinks and *I* feels are therefore not necessarily fillers but indices of involvement. I am nonetheless inclined to interpret them as ritual disclaimers that "cover" the writer and preclude any judgment or criticism of what he says. No one else, he seems to be saying, needs to think what he thinks.

- (A person with a college degree has a better chance for advancement in any field.)
- For example, as it have been stated that secretaries will be one of the highest opening for the 1970.
- (The highest number of openings in the 1970's will be for secretaries.)
- This is true in a since to the writer of the article that many of people today that are being trained on the job or in a special school for these kind of high paying jobs that was once held by college grads are not being taken over by high school grads.
- (What the writer said is true. High school graduates today get trained on the job for high paying jobs that were once held by college grads.)
- My own opinion about the airlines hiring mechanics, is that I doubt very much, due to the fact that they'll usually rehire the people they layed off first.
- (The airlines will probably rehire the mechanics they laid off before they will hire new mechanics.)

*Who* clauses appear less often than *that* clauses; they are, in fact, often displaced by them, *that* being an uninflected, and therefore safer, relativizer. In sentences such as the following (a *who* string with a by now familiar kind of derailment) we see that the writer feels no constraint about using *who* and *that* interchangeably:

I am a 1968 High School graduate *that* has been in the army and *who* has met quite a few people who as I are High School graduates feel that going to a trade school is much better than going to college.

And here a writer simply transplants a whole formula in the hope, perhaps, of getting the *who* inflection right:

. . . but someone has to come out in the open and discuss it to whom it may concern.

But of the *wh*- subordinations, *wh*ich is unquestionably the most used and misused. Like *that*, it functions as a catch-all subordinator:

It was great to learn Staniflovsky's method *wh*ich I know I just spelled his name wrong. As Marlon Brando always uses the method and many other professional actors and actresses. All he talked about was actors and actresses *wh*ich he wished he was a professional actor. He loved the theater so all he talked about was actors, actresses movies, plays. *wh*ich after a while became interesting to me because that's all he ever knew and I had him for 5 days a week.

The first *wh*ich in the above passage "covers" for the inversion

whose name I know, which rarely occurs correctly at this stage. The second *which* seems to be "covering" for *because*. The last clause (*I had him for five days a week*) is probably intended to be a second reason for the subject's being interesting (and *because* I had him for five days a week).

But *which*, while serviceable as a subject or direct object in a subordinate clause (*The paper, which comes in the morning . . . , The paper, which I get in the morning*), is often linked with a preposition (the paper in *which* I read the announcement, or to *which* I subscribe, or for *which* I pay, or from *which* I get my ideas, etc.). Largely idioms of the written language, these various forms of *which* are confusing to many inexperienced writers, who are likely to use the form (either with or without a preposition) in settings where no form of *which* will work:

- Society has set up certain limits of education *which* every citizen has to meet their standards.  
*Which* is an inverted direct object but the writer has not "heard" it and goes on to provide another direct object (*their standards*).
- Most of the more demanding jobs have many people *at which* their financial status is very low or about average.  
*Whose* would work here, of course, but the writer is not likely to be comfortable with it.
- It is a thing *which* gives one self a sense of accomplishment. Especially to the poor *which* I fall in that category.  
Here *which* cannot serve as subordinator because the clause that follows will not accept a complement.
- And you don't always go out for the odds you go out for the ambition *in which* the field that you want to work in.
- I intend to go to college to try to find another field *in which* to take.
- I am going to attend City College after graduation taking a course in Industrial Arts *which* after I complete the course I wish to become a professionally trained teacher.

As many of the above examples illustrate, writers tend to bind *which* to prepositions even when *which* alone seems clearly appropriate:

- The most disadvantage and disappointment is knowing and hoping that somehow the field *in which* one chose does not have an opening after college.
- You know what you want and you can just about demand the price *in which* you think you should receive.

- . . . but because of public pressure he has to fulfill 4 years of studies *of which* he cannot earn a living by when he leaves college.
- The reason comes out, is that they can't find job *in which* they would like to do.
- The child will get is education *of which*, I feel, the father will have little to do with in the child's development into an adolescent.
- America started with violence and fought and drove the indians off land *in which* was theirs.

Finally, in situations where a preposition is bound to a word (as in *involved in* or *sure of*) and the writer has the option of either leaving the phrase as it is and using *which* or splitting the phrase and placing the preposition before *which*, the writer is likely to take up *both* options, producing an unwanted redundancy:

- They felt a person with a college Ed. can handle more easily the problems that arise in the type of work *in which* you are involved *in*.
- And there are so many fields *from which* to choose *from which* a student never really knows.
- Then again there are more jobs *of which* I'm sure *of* that are not going down in demand.
- The college bound student would like to find out *in which* field he or she would be most interested *in*.

Whether they use the structures effectively or not, writers at this level are clearly pressed by the force of their own thoughts and the dynamics of writing to make use of the devices for consolidation that the language offers them. Some of these devices are uncommon in daily speech because of the many other ways speech has of indicating relationships (*tempo*, *pitch*, *emphasis*, *juxtaposition*, etc.) and because of the relative speed at which speech must be produced, but they are evoked by the writing situation, by the silence of the composing process, which urges the writer into specificity and coherence because he can't be certain otherwise that his reader will know what he means. Some of the devices seem "unnatural" because they are not used in the writer's mother tongue, which, despite years of school English, may continue to be the language he is "at home" with. Some devices are initiated because the writer is straining to sound formal and in the process gets himself into deeper syntactic waters than he can negotiate without a further development of his memory for written words and structures.

*Juxtaposition consolidations*

Unlike the elementary-school writers with whom these writers are sometimes carelessly compared, the young adult is not content with "Dick and Jane" sentences nor does he characteristically write them. His difficulty appears, rather, to grow out of an imbalance between his mature perceptions and his rudimentary skills in writing. As we have seen, this imbalance leads both to an overuse of some relationship words (*and* and *that*, for example) and to an abortive use of others. Or it can encourage the writer to rely on mere juxtaposition as a way of consolidating his statements. In the following sentence, for example, the writer has modified the noun *job* by the simple expedient of placing his adjectival elements after the noun, a "logical" strategy but not, unfortunately, a conventional one unless he makes use of certain forms that attach such elements to the sentence:

Now mostly every job you go to get *worthwhile* or *making a decent salary something to live off* is asking for a college degree.

A similar problem arises in this sentence, where the writer's thought calls for some kind of appositional structure that will further define "intellectual period." For want of such a structure, he relies on juxtaposition alone:

I think the author tried to show, that dued to the intellectual period in which we live *the need to categorize things in every respect of life* we tend to lose the natral beauty of what is happening around us.

In another kind of juxtaposition, the writer announces his topic, often a rather elaborate one, and then follows this announcement with a sentence that does not seem to be grammatically linked to the topic announcement. With this device, he is able to center the attention of his reader on the real subject of his discourse and then go on to make statements about it. Unfortunately, he often leaves his reader behind him, hunting for a verb:

- The jobs that's are listed in the paper, I feel you need a college degree.
- Retail buying and merchandizing, there is a tremendous demand.
- A young man would like to become a mechanic or a repairman, there is a special training.

- A country with 200 million or more mouths to feed and no food to feed them, then people will start to steal, rob, and kill for food to eat.
- A sturdy tall trees that stood saluting, the roots came up and it looks as though it standing like a old men with a cane.
- The job that my mother has, I know I could never be satisfied with it.

Even more familiar is the topic announcement followed by a reinforcing pronoun which serves as the grammatical subject of the sentence. Here, because the pronoun represents the topic, the confusion for the reader is mild. Furthermore, the pattern is common enough in speech to sound merely inappropriate for formal discourse:

- The people *they* go to school to look for a husband.
- But as I grew older, those same friends I grew up with *they* despised me.
- The boys father *he* has a job and a family to take care of.

We see in this pattern, once again, the tendency to shorten the span between subject and verb by introducing what in formal English is perceived as a redundant subject. In other sentences where adverbial clauses precede the subject, we have seen the tendency to reach into the adverbial clause for the subject of the independent clause. The inexperienced writer, it would appear, does not want to wander too far from his subject, yet the complex structures his thoughts evoke require that he do so. This is particularly true of the subordinate clause, which, except for its subordinating signal, is another sentence and easily entangled with the base, or independent, clause. Yet shorter modifiers such as appositives, verbal phrases, or adjectives are apparently more difficult to produce. In any event, they appear less often. Introductory participial phrases are rare, as are gerund phrases in the subject position. Adjectives more often appear on the right rather than the left of subjects (*the job that is high-paying* rather than *the high-paying job*). Infinitives, when they do not immediately follow a verb or even in some instances when they do, seem to cause many different types of errors. Not infrequently the structure is missing where it is needed (*It is important for young people attend college*) and often it is inflected as if it were a finite verb (see the next chapter for a fuller discussion of these difficulties).

## Inversions:

As we have seen, the inexperienced adult writer often has difficulty managing the subordinate structures he introduces into his sentences. They obstruct in a variety of ways his progress from subject to verb, posing additional subjects or verbs that must in some way be incorporated into the base sentence without distorting it. We have seen, further, that whether these subordinate structures come before the subject (as with adverbial clauses) or interrupt the progressions from subject to verb (as with relative clauses) or function within the base sentence as subjects or complements (as with noun clauses), they often fracture rather than consolidate a sentence. They add to the number of predications the writer must hold in his mind as he creates his sentence. They pull him, in a sense, from the solo of his base sentence to a complex orchestration of related structures that can easily overpower him grammatically.

There remains another kind of distraction, one that arises not so much because the writer is *adding* to his sentence but because he is *rearranging* it, changing the direction of that habitual flow from subject to verb to complement. Expertly managed, rearrangements of the sentence can gain for the writer a measure of emphasis or variety or grace, but they require a facility with sentence parts and a familiarity with the patterns of inversion that are common in formal writing. The writer, for example, who for good stylistic reasons begins a predication with a direct object is likely to produce it again in its "natural" place:

- It is my belief that *what* you do you should be praised for *it*.
- The things they want you to know* you do not know *this* in high school.

The same type of difficulty often appears where relative pronouns serve as inverted direct objects:

- I am getting able to discuss many different points of view in this course *which* I could not do it before.

5. Had there been many instances of faultily constructed questions, they would have been discussed in this section. However, neither direct nor indirect questions figured significantly among the syntactic errors found in the placement essays. In part, this may be because the topic and mode did not elicit question forms. A teacher can expect to find some students, however, who, influenced by their own dialects, carry over the inversions of direct questions into indirect questions (*we asked him when would he come home rather than when he would come home*).

- So in my senior year he finally got a drama course *which* he finally talked me into and many other people from my junior year to take it as an elective in my second year.

If he begins with one of the set forms for inverting some part of the sentence, he does not always stay with it:

- Not almost all the time when we get out of college we find the job we wish.

The writer of the above sentence has missed the structure *not always do*, which requires a subject-verb inversion. In the sentences below, the writers have difficulty with the unusual *the more the merrier* pattern:

- The more education that one gets its better for them the more experience they get.
- I feel that the more educated a person is how much faster he'll get a job.

One of the most common inverting devices is the expletive *it*, which enables a writer to place his subject after the verb. The structure is familiar to the inexperienced writer in such set forms as "It is said that . . ." or "It is believed that . . ." Yet it can also be troublesome. Since the pronoun *it* figures in other types of problems, teachers tend to lump all *it* errors into one group, even when the causes and solutions of those errors may be very different. Something must first be said, therefore, about the other functions of *it*.

Part of the trouble with the word stems from its vagueness. Like other pronouns, *it* refers to something that has already been mentioned, but unlike *he* or *she*, it can refer to any *thing* in the world as well as to some beings (an animal, for example, or even a child when the sex is unknown or of no importance to the context). Beyond this, it can refer to ideas or situations or even to something in the mind of the writer that never quite gets stated on the page. (Certain idiomatic expressions illustrate this vagueness—"It may rain today." "How far is it to Wall Street?" "It's late." "Let him have it.") In analytical writing, where inanimate nouns and abstract terms tend to be more frequent than in talk or written narrative, the word *it*, with its broad range of designata and slight semantic weight, easily becomes a free-floating substitute for thoughts that the writer neglects to articulate and that the reader must usually strain to reach if he can:

1. With all the jobs available, he will have to know more of it because there is a great demand for it.  
it = the knowledge that is acquired in college
2. Students attending colleges are not only benefiting themselves but it will eventually benefit the community in which they live.  
it = the act of attending college
3. Many people are worried about the problem of racism. But also there are those who pretend it.  
it = to be worried

BW students are not the only students who have difficulty mooring it to the page. But their writing does reveal another use of it (and other pronouns), in a seemingly redundant position after the subject and before the verb:

4. But college today it really not need.
5. I think college it one of the best thing for your future.

This appears to be part of the familiar topic/comment pattern heard in talk (*My brother, he . . . ; Vivian, she . . .*).

When the distance between subject and predicate increases (as when, for example, a *that* clause or an infinitive construction forms the subject), the writer is often likely to use it not simply to re-emphasize or classify his subject but to recapture it:

6. I think this passage is stating that the Reading skills that a high school graduate should have, it is below their average.
7. All the knowledge you receive from going to college be it for academic commercial or general use, it should be enjoyable.
8. The programs that are available now, it enable you to go to school and support a family.

In the examples above, it functions as a pronoun, referring back specifically to real subjects:

- |            |                         |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Sentence 4 | college . . . it        |
| Sentence 5 | college . . . it        |
| Sentence 6 | reading skills . . . it |
| Sentence 7 | knowledge . . . it      |
| Sentence 8 | programs . . . it       |

In each of these sentences, the substitution of some form of the verb to be for it would solve the problem of redundancy (But college today is really not needed). Yet this "simple" change may be resisted by the

writer if he perceives that change as a weakening of the link between subject and predicate.

The two problems with it that have been touched upon so far are different kinds of problems requiring different strategies. The first (sentences 1, 2, 3) is the problem of a loose or inadequately articulated relationship between pronoun and antecedent; the second (sentences 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) is an apparently redundant relationship between pronoun and antecedent. The first creates a semantic problem—the problem of determining what the pronoun means; the second, a word-order problem—the problem of processing a sentence that produces a duplicate subject: the full subject and a pronominal substitute side by side. Clearly the writer's perception of the copula as weak or redundant increases the error "static" around it structures and possibly encourages the introduction of it to reinforce the subject in sentences where subjects are long.

The word it functions not only as a pronoun, however, referring back to something already mentioned, but as a kind of structural device that points ahead to a subject when it is placed after the verb. In this function, it is semantically washed out and serves merely to fill a grammatical slot until the real subject comes along. As a "dummy" or "anticipatory" subject, it combines with a verb—the verb is—and enables the writer to place a long subject at the end of a sentence:

- To go on to college after finishing high school is important.  
It is important to go on to college after high school.
  - Whether you go to college or not after you have finished high school isn't important.  
It isn't important whether you go to college or not after you finish high school.
  - That you go to college after you finish high school is important.  
It is important that you go to college after you finish high school.
- Some students get into difficulty with this structure. They may, for example, create a sentence that requires the "dummy" it and then not produce it:

- It is said that  is important to be able to get jobs in certain fields.  
Note the correct use of it is at the beginning of the sentence where it appears in a set form.
- Many young people today believe  is essential to succeed in this society.
- In the eyes of the person without a college degree  is wrong to give them a job.

Or they may, in casting about for a way to attach an extended subject to its predicate, put the expletive structure at the end rather than the beginning of the predication:

I feel this for a person going to College to Become a nurses or engineers □ it not necessary.

Two operations would be needed to improve this sentence:

1. The deletion of "I feel this," a common filler that commits the writer at the outset to the very kind of syntactic constraint he has difficulty managing in writing, although it is common enough in speech.
2. The introduction of the expletive at the beginning of the sentence and the restoration of the remaining part of the sentence as is: *It is not necessary for a person going to college to become a nurse or engineer.*

The reasons for these difficulties are various. Students whose mother tongues make no use of such a structure as the expletive nor of the copula have a double difficulty in learning it—the *it* carries no semantic weight and the *is* is redundant. The use in Black English Vernacular of *it is* where the formal dialect uses *there is* (*It's not enough food to go around*), while it does not seem to surface at this level in students' writing, may well create ambiguities that inhibit writers from using *it is* in places where it would help smooth out the sentence. For the same reason, sentences beginning with the expletive *there is* are often unsuccessful:

- There is always before entering an academic high school you could see what special vocational and technical high school have to offer you.
- And there can be in some specialize fields they may pay for your living quarters, meals, expenses.  
Note that in both sentences the expletive has had no influence on the sentence. In fact, if it were deleted the sentences would be grammatically correct.

The causes and cures of syntactic errors

Young men and women who have spoken years of sentences cannot be said to be ignorant of sentences. What the material in this chapter does suggest, however, is that when academically ill-prepared young adults write, which they rarely do except in an academic situation, they often

mismanage complexity. This mismanagement gets explained in different ways. One explanation focuses on what the student has not internalized in the way of *language patterns* characteristic of written English, another on his unfamiliarity with the *composing process*, and another on his *attitude* toward himself within an academic setting. And each of these explanations suggests a pedagogy: the pedagogy that stresses grammar, whether in the abstract or as a set of forms to be generated through practice with sentences, tends to assume that students do not have command of many of the forms required in written English and must therefore learn them through explicit instruction; the pedagogy that stresses process (pre-writing, free writing, composing, re-scanning, proofreading, etc.) tends to minimize the value of grammatical and rhetorical study and assume, rather, that students already "know" the wanted forms but cannot produce them, nor anything resembling their own "voices," until they are encouraged to *behave* as writers; the pedagogy that stresses the therapeutic value of writing and seeks the affective response to whatever is read or discussed tends to see *confidence* as central to the writing act and to dismiss concerns with form or process as incidental to the students' discovery of themselves as individuals with ideas, points of view, and memories that are worth writing about. A teacher should not have to choose from among these pedagogies, for each addresses but one part of the problem.

*First, the inexperienced writer is indeed not likely to have command of the language he needs to bring off the consolidations that are called for in writing. If, as we have said, writing presses the writer toward greater explicitness than he would require of himself in speech, and if that explicitness is realized through various types of consolidations—syntactic and semantic—the person who has done little writing may not be able to use some or many of the forms that facilitate consolidation. This inadequacy is reflected in the students' difficulties with vocabulary and sentence structure.*

It is difficult to know what proportion of the syntactic difficulties at this level, in fact, arise solely from vocabulary, that is, from the writer's felt need for a particular word or phrase which he doesn't know or hesitates to produce because he is uncertain of its allowable contexts or of its spelling. Without the "right" word, he often cannot collapse sentences or clauses in ways that preserve his meaning and must thus choose a circuitous syntactic route to his meaning. (The person who has

not learned the word "dregs," as Moffett notes, must speak of "what is left in the cup after you finish drinking.")<sup>6</sup>

Often the consolidating word is not missing from the writer's vocabulary but is simply less accessible than a clause; the writer, that is, cannot "calculate" with words swiftly enough to make the most efficient choice. The writer who became entangled in

The government set up certain jobs which don't required much training to place them in it.

might have had an easier time had a suitable adjective such as *semi-skilled* come to mind. (The government set up semi-skilled jobs for them.) Or the writer who wrote

The employer doesn't want someone who has just started who doesn't have any experience with the job . . .

could have avoided both relative clauses had he thought of *beginner*.

At other times, when the correction of a faulty sentence requires the writer to substitute a new word because the original word cannot be made to shift forms, the writer may not have on tap the word that will get him out of the difficulty. The student who wrote

I did not like anything about the class. His boring lectures. Those stupid conferences. The homework assignments were always too long. The movies we went to see were out of the Dark Ages.

may have had to break the parallel structure he started because he did not have readily at hand an adjective for *assignments that were too long* (too-long assignments?) or *movies that were out of the Dark Ages* (Dark Ages movies?). With alternatives, the parallel structure might have been sustained:

His boring lectures. Those stupid conferences. Tedious homework assignments. Outdated movies.

The imprecise *stupid* may also have been a syntactic compromise because the student could not see how his real meaning (that he couldn't get anything out of the conferences because someone else was always waiting to get in, that the professor always seemed cold and indifferent, and that the conferences never resulted in any improvement) could be condensed to *hurried, cold, unproductive* conferences. Similarly, heavily nominalized sentences, those breeders of ungrammaticality, are often

6. James Moffett, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

difficult to turn around because the writer cannot come up with an appropriate verb. If, for example, the student who writes

The evasion of responsibility on the part of citizens of today . . . will result in the downfall of democratic civilization.

wants to make *civilization* his subject, he will have a hard time proceeding with the sentence unless *collapse* is in his active vocabulary, for he cannot say "our civilization will downfall" or "fall down."<sup>7</sup>

If we extend our meaning of "vocabulary" to include not only the writer's stock of different words but also his agility in shifting word forms to meet the demands of syntax, then vocabulary is an even more pervasive problem than a vocabulary count would suggest. Whether the student does not know the forms (in the sense that he does not habitually produce them in speech) or whether in his concentration on getting all the letters of words down on the page he forgets the grammatical constraints of his sentence and simply writes the form that comes most easily, inappropriate word forms are among the most common errors writers make at this stage:

- People are judged by what they *product* on the job.
- She tells the *difference* changes that the women has experienced.
- It is protecting familyhood of which I am a *strongly* belief.
- It is a big *uncertain* at the moment so I would *strong* suggest to go to college.
- A person who is more *knowledge* . . .
- They work without *supervise*.
- It is very smart and *intelligence*.
- I believe that college can be a further *rewarding* because we are always seeking knowledge.

Still another kind of syntactic problem arises when the student knows the bare word but has no sense of the kinds of relationships that word is permitted with other words in the sentence. (This way of "not knowing" words is encouraged in most vocabulary books, including the thesaurus, and in subject areas that stress objective tests.) The student who wrote

The man grew up in a maladjusted environment.

7. I am indebted to Sarah D'Eiolo for this and the preceding example. I am also indebted to her for the many fresh and illuminating views of student sentences I have gained from her in our discussions over the years about student writing.



intended to suggest, as he later explained, that it was the environment and not the man himself that had caused the maladjustment. Reasoning thus, the writer had placed the adjective in front of the word he wanted it to modify. He was, in short, observing a rule about the position of adjectives in relation to the words they modify, a rule that would have been applicable had he been writing about a *healthy environment* or a *dangerous environment*. What he hadn't counted on was the semantic constraints of the word itself, which because it denoted a response to an environment was semantically bound to the subject, *man*.

When students run into such difficulties with words, they are likely to be confused or even annoyed by a teacher's correction, viewing it at first as an arbitrary correction or even an abrogation of the rules they have already learned. It becomes important therefore for a teacher to try to explain why a certain word won't work in a particular setting—to ponder over the student's choice, demonstrating its semantic and syntactic limits or contrasting it with other words that do not create the same constraints. Otherwise the student will miss the most important point: that while language itself is far more complex than he had realized, it is still influenced by rules and patterns that can be learned in the way that other rules and patterns were learned—by producing sentences and then correcting them.

Vocabulary, then, impinges upon syntax in at least three situations: a student may not know the word that would enable him to consolidate his sentences; he may not know the grammatically appropriate form of that word for his sentence; or he may not know its allowable contexts. None of these difficulties are likely to disappear quickly in response to explicit instruction. Vocabulary grows slowly, with the accretion of contexts acquired as a result of reading, and, if the student is lucky, of exchanges with his teachers.<sup>8</sup> Word-class distinctions, while they can be worked on profitably in systematic ways, with explanations and drills that heighten the student's awareness of words as units with detachable parts that carry grammatical meaning, are only gradually incorporated into the sentences students write themselves. And finally, the allowable contexts of individual words are usually learned, as so much of language is learned, by making mistakes not by memorizing rules. But unlike the child, who is surrounded by adult speech and able

8. For an illuminating analysis of the use of language for learning, see Douglas Barnes, *Language, the Learner and the School* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1969).

therefore to check his utterances against theirs, the apprentice writer has more need of a teacher who can explain to him why words that seem right to him won't work in particular sentences. These explanations inevitably involve grammatical as well as semantic concepts and are much easier to give if the student has some knowledge of the parts and basic patterns of the sentence. (Whatever its direct influence on writing, a rudimentary grasp of such grammatical concepts as subject, verb, object, indirect object, modifier, etc. is almost indispensable if *one intends to talk* with students about their sentences.)

Sentence structure seems easier to get at than vocabulary, especially since the appearance of transformational sentence-combining exercises of the sort described by Mellon in his work on syntactic fluency and subsequently modified by O'Hare (who achieved similar results without the grammatical terminology that Mellon built into his approach).<sup>9</sup> The acquisition of mature structures merely increases the possibility of a student's making the best choice *consistent with his purpose*. (There is nothing intrinsically immature about a coordination nor mature about an ablative absolute without reference to intended meaning.) If that purpose is lost sight of in the rush to sound mature or academic, the writer is in danger of self-consciously decorating his thoughts rather than developing them.

Still, the writers whose sentences we have considered in this chapter are clearly reaching beyond the simple sentence—attempting, often without success, to articulate through structure and the idioms of relationship such connections as sameness and difference, causality, temporality, condition, importance, or attribute. The practice of consciously transforming sentences from simple to complex structures (and vice versa), of compounding the parts of sentences, of transforming independent clauses into dependent clauses, of collapsing clauses into phrases or words helps the student cope with complexity in much the same way as finger exercises in piano or bar exercises in ballet enable performers to work out specific kinds of coordination that must be virtually habitual before the performer is free to interpret or even execute a total composition. The analogy weakens, of course, when we remember that the writer is not performing someone else's composition, that his performance is the composition, and that he cannot therefore

9. John C. Mellon, *Transformational Sentence-Combining*, Research Report #10 (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1969). Frank O'Hare, *Sentence Combining*, Research Report #15 (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971).

as easily isolate technique from meaning. Indeed, should he try to do so, his technique will also be affected. Nonetheless, sentence-combining offers perhaps the closest thing to finger exercises for the inexperienced writer. Whereas traditional grammar study classifies the parts of the sentence, sentence-combining requires the student to generate complex sentences out of kernel sentences. Thus the student who must create

The blunt nose of the Hindenburg bobbed up, hung a moment in the air, and then crumpled toward the field.

out of

The blunt nose of the Hindenburg bobbed up.

The blunt nose hung a moment in the air.

Then it crumpled toward the field.

is solving a grammatical problem at a deeper level than the student who is required to identify each member of the compound predicate in that sentence.<sup>10</sup> With some regulation of the kind and amount of transforming a student does, it is possible to help him move toward complexity without losing grammatical control of the sentence. (What the combining exercises often demonstrate, interestingly, is that the student has already internalized the syntactical forms he needs for complex sentences but that he is "all thumbs" when he tries to get them into written form.) Indeed, the process sharpens his sense of the simple sentence as the basic, subterranean form out of which surface complexity arises, and this insight gives him a strategy for untangling any sentence that goes wrong, whether simple or complex.

To revise a sentence a writer must have a way, a place, a strategy for breaking into it, but beginning writers tend to experience their sentences as unmanageable streams of words which, once set in motion, cannot be turned back. Thus injunctions to revise or reword or even proofread passages often produce merely neater copies of the same sentences, not

10. O'Hare, *Sentence Combining*, p. 93. For a collection of sentence-combining exercises, see William Strong, *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book* (New York: Random House, 1973). Frank O'Hare in his workbook *Sentencecraft* (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn and Co., 1975) not only moves systematically through the basic combinations but also incorporates writing assignments with each lesson. For a multi-media approach to sentence-building which concentrates on the transformations BW students are likely to have most difficulty with, see the videotape series *The English Modules*, written by Sarah D'Eloia, Barbara Gray, Blanche Skurnick, Mina Shaughnessy, and Alice Trillin and produced by the New York Network, an affiliate of the State University of New York, 60 East 42nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.

because the student is recalcitrant but because he does not "see" the parts within his sentences that need re-working. He sees no seams nor joints nor points of intersection—only irrevocable wholes.

Here the problem of unfamiliar forms merges with the second pedagogical problem—that the beginning writer does not know how writers behave. Unaware of the ways in which writing is different from speaking, he imposes the conditions of speech upon writing. As an extension of speech, writing does, of course, draw heavily upon a writer's competencies as a speaker—his grammatical intuitions, his vocabulary, his strategies for making and ordering statements, etc., but it also demands new competencies, namely the skills of the encoding process (handwriting, spelling, punctuation) and the skill of objectifying a statement, of looking at it, changing it by additions, subtractions, substitutions, or inversions, taking the time to get as close a fit as possible between what he means and what he says on paper. Writers who are not aware of this tend to think that the point in writing is to get everything right the first time and that the need to change things is a mark of the amateur. (Thus a student who saw a manuscript page of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, with all its original deletions and substitutions, concluded that Wright couldn't have been much of a writer if he made all those "mistakes.")

Teachers themselves promote this narrow and inhibiting view of perfection by ignoring all stages of the writing process except the last, where formal correctness becomes important, and by confronting students with models of good writing by well-known writers without even mentioning the messy process that leads to clarity. The messiness is indeed writing—the record of a remarkable interplay between the writer as creator and the writer as reader. No sooner has the writer written down what he thinks he means than he is asking himself whether he understands what he said. "How do I know what I think," wrote W. H. Auden, "until I see what I say?" This interplay, the distinctive opportunity in writing, has implications for syntax. If a writer is not worried about being wrong, if he sees a chance for repairing and perfecting his copy at a later point before anyone sees it, he will be free to think about what he means and not worry so much about the way he is saying things, a worry that almost inevitably cuts him off from his best grammatical intuitions. Furthermore, by withholding closure on his sentences, he is more likely to work on them and, in the process,

begin to be aware of his power to make choices (semantic and organizational) that bring him closer and closer to his intended meaning. The ability to re-scan and re-work sentences, however, assumes several things: a memory for unheard sentences, an ability to store verbal patterns visually from left to right, as in reading, and beyond this, an ability to suspend closure on those patterns until, through additions, deletions, substitutions, or rearrangements, the words fit the intended meaning. Young adults who may have impressive memories for what they have heard or watched in life or on film may have short memory spans for written sentences simply because they have not read or written enough to develop that kind of memory. Thus a student who remembers Tom Seaver's earned-run averages or O. J. Simpson's rushing averages over the years and can use those data to make informed guesses about trading possibilities or contract negotiations may, nonetheless, forget the subject of his sentence as his eyes and hand move across the line or on to another page. His movement is headlong, like someone making his way through a lush forest that closes behind him as he moves ahead. Any pattern that counters this pitch forward (the adjective in front of the noun instead of after it, in the complement position, the subject postponed by an expletive or an adverbial clause, etc.) is likely to be avoided or mismanaged, and any behavior that turns him back, as re-scanning, rewording, and proofreading do, is against the grain and must be practiced.

Being able to re-scan and re-work sentences also assumes that the writer is conscious of what he wants to say; otherwise he cannot judge how close he has come to saying it. This consciousness (or conviction) of what one means is difficult to describe. It seems to exist at some subterranean level of language—but yet to need words to coax it to the surface, where it is communicable, not only to others but, in a different sense, to the writer himself. Since teachers can read only words, not minds, they cannot judge the "fit" between what a student intends and what he has written. But inexperienced writers also have trouble locating their purposes. Often in fact they think of purpose as what someone else wants of them. Usually they have not been taught to notice their responses to things nor to value these responses as possible content for academic statements. As a result, they are in the habit of discarding what they need most to be able to write—their felt thoughts—and trying instead to approximate the meaning they think is expected of them. For them, the problem is not so much finding topics to write

on as gaining access habitually to their own responses, their own thoughts, whatever the topic they are writing on. College assignments, and in fact most writing "assignments" in life (except for some self-employed writers), are stipulative. The autonomy of the writer lies in his knowing what he thinks (or perhaps even before that, knowing *that* he thinks), not in his choosing to think on one or two subjects. Without this conviction that he has "something to mean," the writer cannot carry on the kind of conversation with himself that leads to writing. Either he will be blocked from writing or he will allow his words to run on, like an idling engine, disengaged from personal thought or purpose.

To overcome such difficulties, the composition course should be the place where the writer not only writes but experiences in a conscious, orderly way the stages of the composing process itself. English teachers have been trained to look for and at the end product (the completed theme) without questioning the writer's way of composing it (unless, any apprentice, is ignorant of process, with the beginning writer, like perceives writing as a single act, a gamble with words, rather than a deliberate process whereby meaning is crafted, stage by stage. Indeed, beginning writers often blame themselves for having to revise or correct sentences or for taking a long time to get started or even for not being able to start at all—problems only too familiar to the professional writer as well. With some insight into the methods of other writers, they can begin to exploit those halts and hesitations rather than feel embarrassed about them.

The subject of how writers work, where and how they get their ideas, how they nurse them into form—including their idiosyncratic preferences for certain kinds of paper or pens or tables or times of day, as well as the routines they follow for arriving at final copy—such information is important to the beginning writer.<sup>11</sup> It reveals the mess and privacy of the behavior called writing, and beneath that, a sequence of concentrations that seem implicit in the act of writing:

1. Getting the thought—recognizing it, first, and then exploring it

11. The *Paris Review* series *Writers at Work* is an excellent source of information on the composing habits of a wide range of modern writers. (Viking/Compass, First Series, 1957, Second Series, 1963, Third Series, 1967.) See also Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971) and "The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing," *College Composition and Communication*, April 1964, pp. 1-4.

- enough to estimate one's resources (motivational and informational) for writing about it.
2. Getting the thought down—proceeding, that is, into the thick of the idea, holding on to it even as the act of articulation refines and changes it.
3. Readyling the written statement for other eyes, a matter of catching whatever in the content or form is likely to deflect the reader's attention from the writer's meaning.

Students usually have difficulties with each of these steps in the composing process. They seldom, as we have mentioned, know what they ought to—or want to—write about. They have not been trained to recognize or respect their own intellectual vibrations, those inner promptings that generally reveal to writers where their best energies lie. More often, their training has been in the opposite direction—to try to understand or catch the sense of what someone else wanted them to do, as if the theme they were to write existed elsewhere in perfect form and their task was to approximate it.

Paradoxically, we tend to discover what we as individuals have to say by talking with others. Here, in the give-and-take of discussion, we see our experiences in larger contexts: what seemed idiosyncratic or unimportant before now illuminates a general truth; what seemed obvious must now be defended; what seemed inexplicable now begins to make sense. Ideas come out of the dialogue we sustain with others and with ourselves. Without these dialogues, thoughts run dry and judgment falters. Even accomplished writers, deep into the sense of their subjects, doubt at moments the worth of what they are saying and wait uneasily to be judged by their readers. The student who has been systematically isolated as a writer both from his own responses as a thinker and speaker and from the resources of others not only needs these other voices but needs to become conscious of his own. Until this happens, he is locked into a linguistically barren situation, forced to say something when he thinks he has nothing to say. No wonder, then, that "getting started" is the most difficult of all the writing problems. No wonder that injunctions to "develop" or "expand" are interpreted as license to "pad." Without strategies for generating real thought, without an audience he cares to write for, the writer must eke out his first sentence by means of redundancy and digression, strategies that inevitably disengage him from his grammatical intuitions as well as his thought.

Precisely because writing is a social act, a kind of synthesis that is reached through the dialectic of discussion, the teaching of writing must often begin with the experience of dialogue and end with the experience of a real audience, not only of teachers but of peers. Yet classrooms in their usual asymmetrical arrangements with the teacher on one side, talking, and the students on the other, listening—or looking at the backs of other students' heads—do not breed discussion. Neither do the counter-classrooms that abandon procedures and objectives under the illusion that freedom is something people simply fall into after authoritarian structures crumble. What is needed is a classroom model that grants teachers the responsibility for content and procedure but at the same time grants students the kind of social independence they need in order to think and speak and write for themselves.

Useful models already exist. M. L. J. Abercrombie, searching for a way of teaching that would stimulate independent thought among science students in England, has developed a model for small-group teaching (and many insights into that method) that is adaptable to the experience and upon the work of others in small-group dynamics, has written persuasively about collaborative learning and has developed a writing workshop at Brooklyn College that uses this method in the training of tutors and tutees.<sup>12</sup> Betty Rizzo, working with students at City College who failed two or even three semesters of conventional remediation, has developed a model for peer teaching in small groups that has had impressive results.<sup>13</sup>

All these approaches share several features. They break the class up or limit the class initially to small groups (six to twelve students) that work on carefully prepared assignments; the assignments generally pose specific problems or assign tasks that students work on individually first and then collaboratively; the teacher plans the assignments and acts as a resource person during the class sessions, sometimes giving information when students ask for it, sometimes entering into the discussion in order to summarize or sharpen the group's awareness of where their discussion is going or of how seemingly contradictory or irrelevant comments are related to the comments of others. The method

12. See M. L. J. Abercrombie, *The Anatomy of Judgment* (New York: Basic Books, 1960) and Kenneth Bruffee, "The Way Out: A Critical Survey of Innovations in College Teaching," *College English*, January, 1970, pp. 457-70.

13. Betty Rizzo, "Student Teaching in English 1," paper delivered at the National Convention of the College English Association, Philadelphia, April 1974.

requires many adjustments for teachers and students, but when skillfully used can change the dynamics of classroom behavior in remarkably productive ways.

When the writer moves from spoken to written discourse, he faces a formidable task of synthesis. Somehow he must sort and link and refine his thoughts along the lines that serve his individual purpose—a purpose that is itself influenced by the act of articulation. At this point, he needs the help of his teacher or an expert tutor who can serve (as a trusted friend or editor might serve the professional writer) as another pair of eyes and another set of responses. But teachers customarily "correct" papers rather than read them. Whereas the ordinary reader tries to understand what he is reading, the writing teacher, like a lawyer examining a client's document for all possible ambiguities and misinterpretations, tries to see what keeps the paper from being understood or accepted. Unfortunately he habitually makes this evaluation *after* the student has finished writing his paper, not during the composing process. Like most writers, the student writer reaches closure on what he has written once he has put it into circulation (that is, into the teacher's hands for grading). Some authors resist reading their books once they are in print: the imperfections they may find are no longer in their control, so why suffer. Similarly apprentice writers tend to gloss over the painstaking corrections and suggestions of their teachers because they cannot mobilize themselves to work on something they regard as finished. The teacher may view a theme pedagogically, as a stepping stone to the next theme; the student, however, like most writers, is more likely to regard the work he has just completed as a discrete creation, important for itself but not particularly interesting when viewed in the context of his "works" for the semester.

If the teacher is to act as editor rather than reviewer, he needs to confer with the student while his paper is in progress. He needs to remember, too, that his purpose is to recommend or prescribe *in the interest of the student's purpose or intent*, to find out, through questions, through collaborative re-phrasing, through talk, what the purpose is and to be wary of substituting his stylistic preferences for those of his students, riding (and writing) roughshod over the student's meaning in the interest of grace or economy or ferreting out errors without commenting upon or even noticing what the writer is getting at, as if thought were merely the means for eliciting grammatical forms.

Finally, when the student has reached the limit of his thoughts, or

more likely, his time, he must be able to prepare his written statement for other eyes. Unfortunately, proofreading, the central skill for this stage of the writing process, is one of the "simple" skills students seldom learn. It is important for syntax not only because it enables the writer to correct himself but because it frees him while he is writing from the inhibiting worry about being wrong. But it is a way of reading that must be learned, not merely enjoined or, worse, taken over by the teacher. Seeing things is always a selective activity—a matter of *not* seeing some things in order to see others. In proofreading the reader must be trained to look consciously at what he would normally need to ignore—features of the code itself. In some instances, as with syntax or inflections, he must often re-code the written statement into speech before he can determine whether he has written what he intended; in others, as with punctuation or spelling, he must consciously review the rules that govern those conventions. Many of the errors we have considered in this chapter would never have been produced in speech by the writers, yet the writers missed seeing them on the page. They could not objectively their own product in this way, although they may well have caught similar errors written by their peers. Nor are they likely to learn how to do this so long as teachers keep marking the errors for them rather than training them to see for themselves.

Our concern with process merges easily with the third pedagogical problem—that *the student lacks confidence in himself in academic situations and fears that writing will not only expose but magnify his inadequacies*. Such a feeling is antithetical to the impulse that leads people to write. From its origin, writing has been a way of protecting important facts, events, or creations from the transformations of time and space. It is, above all, an act of confidence, an assertion of the importance of what has gone on inside the writer, an exhibition of his thoughts or experiences. The student who mistrusts his thoughts or cannot locate them is hardly in a position to write about them. And little about the academic situation he is caught in is likely to reduce his self-doubts. Self-doubt may indeed be the lesson he has learned in school.

For what, after all, are the conditions under which the academic writer is expected to perform? They are, as we have said, stipulative—restricted usually to a certain topic and mode and often, as in the essay question, to the point of view that has been promoted in class lectures.

They are for the most part unmotivating conditions—messages that the writer has no impulse to send and that the reader (teacher) probably would not choose to read if he were not being paid to be an examiner. They ignore, in short, the conditions that would ordinarily give rise to writing, and while many students have developed strategies for writing under these conditions, the inexperienced writer is undone by them. Cut off from the impulse to say something, or from the sense that anything he might say is important to anyone else, he is automatically cut off from the grammatical intuitions that would serve him in a truly communicative situation. Thus his real problems with syntax are exacerbated by the conditions under which he must write. Uncertain of what to say, he avoids crisp beginnings with real subjects and starts instead with empty fillers (*it is my opinion that, in this world today, it is believed that*). He avoids active verbs (*preferring make application to to apply to or which are an interference against to which interfere with*) or backs off in other ways, both syntactically and semantically, from his statements:

- I feel that college education is basically used for men and women to face problems.  
(College helps men and women face problems.)
- I don't believe that a student should determine whether or not to attend college chiefly on the basis of financial but that of the importance of obtaining qualified educational background.  
(A student should not go to college to earn more money but to get an education.)
- By paying directly it is assured that we get better service.  
(By paying directly, we get better service.)
- His ability to cope with people around him will be on a better basis.  
(He will cope better with other people.)

Unwittingly, and out of a tentativeness that is not of his making, the inexperienced writer draws upon the same passive constructions, the same circumlocutions and evasions as the bureaucrat, who uses these syntactic strategies deliberately, as a way of blurring or suppressing information.<sup>14</sup> How ironic it would be if so-called "remedial" English 14. "Mull the marvelous language," writes Wilfred Sheed of the Watergate hearings, "not just the familiar examples but the whole cunningly flaccid tone of it: 'I am hopeful that' for 'I hope'; he is 'supportive of,' 'dependent on,' 'cognizant that.' The bureaucratic mind recoils from the active verbs because they fix responsibility. So, too, 'I was wrong' becomes 'my judgment was incorrect.' The petty official abandoning ship becomes passive in every pore, barely breathing: perhaps we'll take him for a passenger" ("The Good Word," *New York Times Book Review*, December 9, 1973).

were to produce no more than a mastery of bureaucratic syntax! Yet without reforming the conditions under which students are expected to write, particularly during the early stages of their apprenticeship, it is difficult to see how they will ever learn—or want to learn—to write well.

We see then that many syntactic difficulties are rooted in the differences between writing and speaking—in the fact that writing serves a different purpose from speech, that it tends to exploit syntactic possibilities in language that speech either need not or cannot exploit, that it demands coordinations of hand and eye that a speaker does not automatically control and that inhibit the production of grammatically sound sentences (even, at times, where relatively simple predications are involved), that it is created through a process that is both more extended and conscious than the process whereby speech is created, and finally, that it removes the writer from the supports of dialogue and puts him on his own in ways that even experienced writers find formidable.

If it is true that many of the difficulties we see at the surface of sentences are caused by the effort to recode speech into writing rather than by an ignorance of common syntactic patterns, then the first objective in the improvement of written syntax ought to be to give the student access in writing to what he already knows as a speaker. This means practice; it means more writing than the student has ever done before. We have as yet no adequate record of the speech repertory of the students whose written language we have been analyzing, but the obvious sophistication of so many of these students as speakers and the general understanding we have from linguists about language acquisition suggest that many of their syntactic problems will disappear simply with more writing. This seems rather obvious, yet the amount of writing required of students not only in English courses but in their other courses as well is, if anything, dwindling, for the very reason that their minimal skills require more work of their teachers. In most colleges, writing instruction is confined to freshman English courses, where students are expected to write about ten essays a semester or, generously, about 500 to 800 words a week. For the apprentice writer, 1,500 to 2,000 words a week is not unrealistic. But even this is not enough. Ways ought to be found to increase students' involvement with writing across the curriculum. This does not mean simply persuading more teachers in other subjects to require term papers but making writing a

more integral part of the learning process in all courses. Writing is, after all, a learning tool as well as a way of demonstrating what has been learned. It captures ideas before they are lost in the hubbub of discourse; it encourages precision; it requires, even in the less autonomous work of taking down lecture or reading notes, that the writer make judgments about what is essential, and finally, it lodges information at deeper levels of memory that can be reached by more passive modes of learning. The lecture notes students take, the passages they choose to transcribe from their reading, the jottings they make on their own ideas or observations—these and other *in situ* formulations are also writing, and teachers who regard term papers as barren exercises or who resent any editorial time they must give to them can still build writing into their courses. They can require that students keep efficient class notes or commonplace books or journals and they can encourage in countless ways the habit of writing things down (but not necessarily “up” as finished products).

To further integrate writing into the curriculum, courses can be formally linked so that the academic content of one course can serve the writing course as well, thereby relieving the writing teacher of the task of fabricating writing situations and at the same time encouraging the content teacher to plan more occasions for writing. Speech, reading, and writing courses can be taught collaboratively, thereby increasing the possibility of reinforcement rather than redundancy in language instruction and tripling the amount of time to be spent on language skills in one semester. Or the entire cluster of language skills courses can be linked to one or two content courses, thereby providing a semester’s program that coordinates performance with content. Administratively looser arrangements are also possible. Kenneth Bruffee, for example, has developed at Brooklyn College a writing cooperative in which member teachers agree to assign in their freshman classes one or two essays early in the semester, and writing teachers agree to accept and work on these assignments in their courses as well.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

The emphasis in this chapter on process and practice rather than on direct grammatical instruction as a way of improving syntax implies that the learners know more about sentences than they can initially

15. See CADRE, *Newsletter of the Freshman Writing Program at Brooklyn College*, Fall 1973.

demonstrate as writers. Yet we have also said that the effort to translate the “inner” speech of thought into written language taxes and ultimately extends the writer’s syntactic resourcefulness. Just how and when this happens we do not know. Direct intervention in the form of drills or grammatical explanations may help where a student’s ability to handle a specific pattern is in question (patterns of comparison, for example, or certain uses of *which*) or where common operations habitually disorient him (creating parallel structures or spanning introductory dependent clauses). Pattern practice and sentence-combining exercises can increase the frequency of “mature” sentences, if we mean by “maturity” a readiness to produce complex subordinations but not necessarily the ability to make judgments about the appropriateness of those structures in particular settings. One suspects, however, that the greatest gains are made in those moments—or hours—when the writer, in his effort to say what he has in mind, comes to terms with the exasperating literalism of the medium, a literalism imposed by the need to get all the letters of words down on the page, to get words in the right place, to point up relationships between words and between sentences so that the reader can follow the flow of thought, to be sensitive to the neutral possibilities of words so as to avoid the distortions and misunderstandings that occur when readers are led to make the wrong choices of meaning. This is more than exercise; it is a wrestling with Jacob’s angel to claim one’s meaning within the constraints of a specific situation. Here, to extend considerations of syntax over large numbers of predications, to distinguish between subordinate and coordinate relationships, to ponder over syntactic options is to be engaged in thinking at a level of abstraction and with a degree of deliberation that is certain to affect not only a student’s writing but his thinking as well.

It is the business of a writing class to make writing more than an exercise, for only as a writer, rather than as an exerciser, can a student develop the verbal responsiveness to his own thoughts and to the demands of his reader that produces genuinely mature syntax. As we have seen, many non-grammatical conditions and considerations enter into such an achievement—the amount of writing (and reading) students do, the preconceptions they have about good and bad writing, their attitudes toward themselves as writers, their composing habits, and the connections they make with ideas and audiences. These, then, become matters that a teacher of young adults must consider if he would influence in any lasting way the syntax of his students’ sentences.