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ENGLISH**

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# Effective English

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# Effective English

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By J. R. and V. B. Hulbert  
The University of Chicago

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## PREFACE

This book is the crystallization of twenty years' experience in teaching composition in college. Probably almost every idea in it has been expressed before in other books on rhetoric; whatever value as a textbook this volume may have comes from its particular combination of ideas and precepts, a combination which constant work with students has made us feel to be most desirable. We have not tried to be startlingly original because we are convinced that the gradual evolution of rhetorical theory and doctrine has not been in vain, that such old acquaintances as unity, emphasis, and coherence are not phantoms but essential realities. On the other hand, we are not conscious of improperly using the writings of our predecessors. If material which resembles parts of Gardiner's, Herrick and Damon's, Canby's, Woolley's, or Boynton's books appears herein, the reason is that we have used them for years with our classes and have incorporated some of their doctrines into our modes of thought. The basis of this book was put together during a vacation in Siena, Italy, without a single work on rhetoric or the English language on hand.

For assistance in the development of the book we owe our gratitude to several friends: to Professor Edith

Foster Flint for permission to select from her collection of incorrect sentences whatever we wished to use as examples or exercises; to Professor Robert Morss Lovett and Mrs. Ruth Lovett Ashenhurst for reading our manuscript and making suggestions for its improvement; and to former students for the use of themes and letters.

Our former students will not need to be told that we should welcome any report of errors in the book and any suggestions for making it better which they may care to send to us. Indeed, anyone who can indicate to us ways of improving our work will be doing us the greatest of favors.

J. R. H. V. B. H.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

March, 1929

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

(A Chapter Which Ought To Be Read)

#### I. HOW WE ACQUIRE OUR SPEECH

A means of communication, of expressing ideas, desires, plans, is essential for any organized human life. Without such an aid, government of any sort would be impossible, since its laws could not be made known, and even the simplest home life or business would be out of the question. Hence, everywhere in our day, men, even those in savage society, have a means of communicating their wishes and thoughts—language. This tool every normal child acquires in life without conscious effort but with a good deal of actual work. Helped by precept and correction from his elders and by ridicule from his comrades, a child bit by bit learns the language of the community by imitating those around him. Thus in every society, from the savage to the most highly civilized, the normally endowed adult uses a form of language which is understood by his acquaintances and which in no essential differs from theirs. A group of higher social standing might regard the speech of a day laborer as incorrect or vulgar, but his own group speaks as he does and notices nothing peculiar in his expression. As long, therefore, as the individual remains in the group in

which he has grown up, he needs no formal instruction in his speech.

## II. HOW WE STANDARDIZED OUR SPEECH

Before the advent of the modern epoch, a man usually kept throughout his life the social position he acquired at birth; a medieval serf generally remained bound to the earth until he died. But today nothing is more common than the country boy who goes to the city to engage in business and who, in winning his fortune, adopts the speech and the manners of those with whom he associates. Democracy and the present facilities for communication tend, moreover, to standardize speech over large territories and to bring local peculiarities into disrepute, so that a child begins at school consciously to divest himself of the latter and to substitute for them more widely accepted forms.

Even with writing, in early times, one needed no instruction beyond that in the mechanics of penmanship, because one wrote letters to friends whose vocabulary and grammar differed in no way from one's own. As literature developed, men wrote treatises or poems for their own small groups, circulating them in individual manuscripts; and it was not until the introduction of printing, when hundreds of copies instead of one were made at one time, that anyone troubled about the particular form of language to be used. For instance, Caxton, the first printer in England, states in the introduction to his translation of the *Aeneid* that the lan-

guage of people in one part of the country differed so radically from that in another that he had had difficulty in deciding which were the best forms and words to convey his meaning to his readers. Moreover, as time passed, modes of written expression became more and more polished; for example, the paragraph developed as a subordinate unit in the composition, and sentence forms became more complex and varied and more specifically adapted to the ideas conveyed. In fact, writing came to be an art.

### III. WHY COMPOSITION IS TAUGHT IN THE UNITED STATES

Nevertheless, little or no formal instruction in writing was thought necessary till perhaps a century and a half ago (and indeed, in our childhood it hardly appeared in the grammar schools of the United States, and to this day is used still less in England). The reasons for the slow development of instruction in composition are not far to seek: most people wrote nothing but business or personal letters, in which crudity of expression could stand without harm to the writer, and the professional literary man trained his sense of form and style by reading. Indeed, the literary man still does so; probably not one in a hundred of the professional writers of our day owes anything to school instruction in composition. To be successful they must have an innate ability for writing, and it is doubtful whether the teachings of rhetoric would be of any real value to them.

A realization of the need for the study of one's own

language came in the eighteenth century in England, as part of the extensive efforts to "fix" English, i.e., to establish as permanent that particular form of our speech which had appeared in the good literature of the times just preceding and to "improve" it by the removal of apparent inconsistencies and illogical usages. In the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, consequently, there appeared dictionaries, treatises on grammar, and even some on rhetoric. Widespread study of "composition," however, started not in England but in the United States, and it did so because of our democratic spirit. In all American high schools and colleges, and even in many grammar schools, students write "themes," and teachers correct them, trying to inspire their pupils to better work, in consequence of our belief that every child should have as good an opportunity for success in life as the other members of his generation. Our aim has been not to train most children as domestic servants or artisans, and to prepare only a few to be gentlemen and ladies, but rather to give every child such a general basic education that he will be able to use all his powers and to reach that station in life for which his own talents fit him.

Of the various parts of such an education, it is generally realized that none is so important as "English," the training of one's ability to use properly one's mother tongue in writing and in speech. The reason for this attitude is simple. Though, as stated before, a person's untrained speech would be quite sufficient for

oral communication with people of the same social group, in America no one knows into what social groups a youth's abilities may carry him, and so every ambitious youth must prepare himself to use "good English" in order to make a favorable impression on the cultivated people with whom, if he is a success, he will need to associate. Moreover, in a highly organized society like ours, every person who reaches any position above that of the common laborer has many occasions for writing—occasions of such significance to him that inability to convey his ideas correctly may result in great loss. There is no need, surely, to develop examples: everyone knows the importance of letters in business, professional, and social life, and most people realize the significance of the "statements" issued to the press by persons engaged in public and commercial affairs. Professional men must write reports and addresses to be delivered before general audiences or conventions; people of almost all occupations write articles for magazines on subjects vital to themselves. Thus in order to be able to speak in such a way as not to bring discredit upon one's self and in order to be able to express one's ideas effectively in writing, everyone who aims at a career above that of the humble craftsman or housewife must have training in English composition.

#### IV. WHY WRITE CORRECTLY?

In this study of composition there are two main parts: the purely mechanical facts of grammar and



usage involved in *correct* writing, and the logical-intellectual factors involved in *effective* writing. *Correct* writing, a matter of rule and precept, must be stressed first, and hence through high school the student usually works at grammar and exercises in usage. Only when he has mastered this first part, is he ready to take up the second and devote his attention to presenting material in an interesting, persuasive manner.

Perhaps this is the place to say something about the validity of the rules of grammar and usage. Any lively, observant student can find violations of those rules—violations of almost, if not quite, all of them—in the works of writers of good standing. Such a boy or girl is likely to think, "If Kipling can use 'which' with a merely implied antecedent, and can punctuate a relative clause as a sentence, why can't I do so?" And the generalizing mind is prone to go farther and think that *all* rules are buncombe—pedantic unrealities foisted upon students by the dull company of teachers. It is true that the violation of any one or two of these rules is a relatively trivial matter, that it may even be effective in the style of a skilful writer. Certainly the vividness and power of expression of a Kipling or Galsworthy make any slight divergencies from standard usage in his writing insignificant. But most students cannot offer such compensation for incorrectness of style; and most of them will make countless mistakes, instead of a few, if they do not train themselves to observe rules. In any case, a rebellious student must remember that rules of grammar and



usage are valid generalizations, in the main true of all good modern writing.

Moreover, to the average person of no great reputation as writer or "authority" there is a secondary importance in observing rules: they have become a shibboleth of culture. That is, people who learned some if not all of the rules in their student days judge the culture, social background, and education of other people by the extent to which the latter conform to these rules in their speech and writing. Many a person has failed to get a position for which he was applying because, either in his speech during an interview with the prospective employer or in his letter of application, he violated some one or more of these rules. It is unfortunately true that often the mistake is really of unimportant character, a misspelt word or a colloquial usage which many cultivated people accept: the employer is often far more of a pedant than any teacher of composition would be.

#### V. THE PLAN AND PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Though training in correct usage and grammar begins in the grades and usually extends through high school, many students reach college without having attained the ability to write good English. For this comparative failure of the elementary instruction, the influence of colloquial speech (quite proper in conversation, perhaps, but out of place in writing), of newspapers, and of popular fiction magazines is largely responsible.

In any case, it is necessary for a college instructor, even in Sophomore courses in composition, still to correct mistakes in spelling, grammar, and usage, and consequently there must be sections for review of the latter subjects in this book. If the student does not need the instruction of those sections, his written work will indicate the fact, and he need pay no attention to them.

The primary aim of the book, however, is to discuss methods of effective writing. The customary way of doing so is to make an artificial division of writing, according to the purposes which lead men to write, so as to center attention on the best means of accomplishing those aims. This standard division is the familiar fourfold one: exposition, argument, description, and narration. The sole purpose of this division is to give a student, by means of specialization, a mastery of writing as a whole; it does not imply that people write pure description, narration, exposition, or argument. Indeed, the first two are nearly always combined in actual use; description and narration are frequently present in exposition; and argument of any value could hardly be written without exposition. Yet by taking up first one part of the division and then another, one can study to the best advantage devices for gaining all kinds of effects. Such a method is surely more complete and scientific than the only one hitherto suggested, that of imitation of individual classic pieces of literature (Stevenson's "sedulous ape").

The way of carrying out the teachings of such a book

as this on composition is obviously the production of short pieces of writing in which the theories herein expressed are applied: that is, the student reads a section perhaps on description of a certain type and then tries to compose a piece of writing which carries out the teaching of the text. If the student is working alone, he may well follow that act by reading as many examples of the type as he can find (for instance, in a book of selections) and then by writing still another theme with the models in mind. He should put both these themes away and go on to other work, perhaps to the next type of writing discussed; in a week or two he should reread his two themes and see whether he can find faults in them. If he can, he should revise them and write two or more entirely new ones, with the same aim. If he develops as he should, he will probably find, by the time he has completed the book and written all the kinds of composition presented there, that his earlier themes seem infantile, "amateurish." Then he might well write an entirely new series and go on to more complicated writing in which several forms of composition blend. Such entirely private study carried on pertinaciously by a talented student produces the best result because it develops a high type of ability, initiative, and individuality.

#### VI. WHY WE HAVE TEACHERS OF COMPOSITION

An easier and more rapid course is that of the student who works with a teacher. A teacher can give

a pupil, from the beginning, the benefits of wide experience and a mature point of view. The good teacher of composition knows precisely all the facts of grammar and of usage, has read widely and has observed the methods and qualities of effective writers, is familiar with the ideas and devices offered in books on rhetoric, and has a lively interest in students and their work, as well as a desire to help them improve their writing. In anything so entirely personal as one's speech or writing, especially when one is expressing cherished ideas and theories or experiences and feelings, one is likely to feel sensitive toward criticism. Many a student, when looking over a criticized theme, quite misses the spirit with which the teacher has worked. If he sees many criticisms on the back and along the margins, he thinks that the teacher is "finding fault" with him, does not like his writing, is perhaps prejudiced against him. Actually such a mass of comment is evidence of the interest which the teacher takes in him, for such criticism means work of brain and hand. Unless he were insane, no teacher would trouble to write extensive comments merely for malice. It is easier for him to dismiss the theme with a word or two; and if the student or the theme does not interest or appeal to him, he will probably follow that course. Nearly all teachers of composition wish to help the student to grow, take an interest in each pupil personally, and are happy when they perceive improvement in the student's work. Indeed, a feeling of usefulness to students is a teacher's chief recompense for the

heavy labor of mind, eye, and hand in the correction of themes. Hence the student should look upon his teacher as at least a potential helper in his efforts at developing himself.

It must be admitted, of course, that the teacher is not infallible; no human being is. Great lawyers, famous medical specialists, make mistakes; naturally in so intricate and delicate a matter as writing, even long-experienced instructors at times will have wrong impressions and give poor advice. Moreover, it sometimes happens that teacher and pupil differ so radically in tastes, interests, and ideas that there is no common meeting ground. In such a situation a teacher no doubt will do his best to be of use; a student, on his part, should follow the teacher's directions and adapt himself as far as possible to the teacher's conceptions of good work because the average student has not sufficient knowledge or experience to determine whether his instructor's ideas are right or wrong. If he suspects the latter, it is best for him merely to finish one course with the teacher and then to elect a different instructor; thus he can check his former instruction with that of his next guide. In general, it is best not to pursue many courses in composition with a single instructor, because one gets value from the differing viewpoints of several teachers, learns a wider range of devices and methods from two or three experts than from one, and gets more stimulus to high achievement in various ways.

## CHAPTER II

### PLANNING THE COMPOSITION (SIMPLE EXPOSITION)

#### I. WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

In life outside the schoolroom no one thinks of writing on a subject unless he has a vital interest in it and considerable knowledge of it: a merchant may wish to give his reasons for favoring a high tariff on a certain kind of goods; a labor leader may want to justify his union in making certain demands of the employer; a scientist may want to explain a discovery which he has made and to indicate its uses; a social worker may feel called to plead for means of ameliorating some particular condition; a teacher may desire to make clear certain needs of the schools in his town. In all such cases the potential writer has a strong motive for writing and, at least in part, expert knowledge of the subject. In classroom work, unfortunately, those two requirements hardly exist. In particular the student usually has no other motive than that of fulfilling the assignment. Yet if he will give thought enough to the matter, he can find a subject of which he has at least some real knowledge. In general, before writing it is best to ask one's self, "Do I know more about this subject than other members of the class or other people of my own age and condition?" Such considerations will rule out all sub-



jects which the student recognizes to be hackneyed and of common knowledge. It will rule out also discussion of abstract virtues and vices, large general social or political topics, or subjects on which one has only a little hearsay knowledge. Yet if the student has continuously and earnestly thought about almost any subject and feels that he has unusual ideas about it, he is in a way an expert on that subject and can write on it with the hope of interesting others.

Perhaps it may seem at first that these limitations leave the student without any subjects for composition. The student may think of his youth and lack of experience and feel that he knows nothing well enough to expound it. Actually, however, most students have much knowledge, derived from observation and experience, from which they can choose excellent subjects. Boys, in particular, usually know a good deal about processes, whether of farming or merchandising, about science and mechanics, about living conditions in certain parts of the country, etc. The experience of girls is usually more limited; but frequently they have knowledge derived vicariously from the occupations of fathers or brothers, and they may have knowledge of social conditions, Sunday-school work, or teaching. No one except a dullard has passed through eighteen or more years of life without storing his mind with knowledge derived not from school but from observation and experience. It is from this latter store that the subjects for college themes should be drawn.

Two other requirements of a good subject need mentioning: (1) it should seem vital and important to the writer, and (2) it should be one that can be made clear and, if possible, interesting to the average reader. As to the first requirement, it should be obvious that if the writer does not feel the subject to be significant he cannot make the reader think it worth writing about. The subject may seem unimportant in itself; it is the faith of the writer that makes it significant. Thus Burns could make a poem on a field mouse; John Burroughs could fascinate the reader by a discussion of a common bird; James Bryce could make the dry subject of government vital and alive; J. Arthur Thomson can interest a reader who has no knowledge of biology in the microscopic life along the seashore. As to the second requirement, it is possible to make any subject clear. But only a clever, experienced writer can make an explanation of the minutiae of a machine process intelligible to general readers who know little about machines. Witness the failure of explanations of the gasoline engine in handbooks for motorists. Similarly, inexperienced writers are likely to develop extremely abstract subjects in so vague a fashion that unless the reader is an expert on those subjects he cannot comprehend them. Thus students' themes on subjects derived from philosophy, psychology, or the theory of education are usually failures. Yet a William James can make such material clear and interesting. The essentials, therefore, of a good subject are that the writer should have a real knowledge of it,



that it should seem to him important and interesting, and that it should be of such a nature that a non-professional writer can make it clear to the reader.

*Exercise:* Indicate what is wrong with the following topics as prospective subjects for themes.

1. How to make fudge
2. The nature of reality
3. The superiority of the Underwood typewriter over other typewriters
4. Teaching beginners to read
5. Einstein's theory of relativity
6. Methods of measuring the velocity of light
7. Politeness is to do and say the kindest thing in the kindest way
8. The construction of an aeroplane
9. How to read a newspaper
10. The transmission gear of a motor car
11. Laboratory methods in galvanotaxis
12. Superiority of the city over the country as a home for children
13. How to change a tire
14. Home life in Japan

## II. HOW TO LIMIT A SUBJECT

When a student has decided on a subject which meets these requirements, he should consider whether his first conception of it is precisely the one which he will use. The subject may be too large or too small for an article of the length he is planning. In most cases, however, it will be too big. Thus, if a student is preparing an article of about one thousand words, it is futile to try to write a history of Italian painting, or to explain how a department store is organized and works, or to discuss physiography or astronomy. In the space at his disposal he

could give the barest summary or outline of those subjects. In order to make an article that is of any value, limitation is necessary. Perhaps the simplest way of deciding on a limitation is to consider some of the aspects of the whole subject and decide whether one of them would develop to about the right length and would be a pleasant one at which to work. Thus, differences between early Sienese and Florentine painting, the work of a buyer for one department of a store, methods of forecasting weather, or the problem of life on Mars might be chosen. If, later, it becomes evident to the student that the subject is too small, that not enough is known about it, or that it can be developed clearly and completely in shorter space, he can join it to another aspect of the general subject which logically suggests itself to his mind.

*Exercise:* For five of the following subjects make limitations suitable to themes of one thousand words.

1. Medieval manners and customs
2. The industrial revolution
3. The flora and fauna of the United States
4. The history of banking
5. English explorers
6. Christianity
7. The life of Napoleon Bonaparte
8. Socialism
9. The history and literature of the Celts
10. The development of the automobile
11. The meat-packing industry
12. Radio-activity
13. Intercollegiate athletics
14. Differences between high-school and college life

15. Prohibition

16. Secret societies in college and high school

N.B.: If the student has not knowledge enough of some of these subjects to limit them, he can find help in an encyclopedia.

### III. HOW TO ADAPT WRITING TO THE MIND OF THE READER

After limiting the subject, the writer must next plan the composition. If he would write effectively and logically, he must utilize in the process the well-known principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis. These recognized principles are not the inventions of teachers of rhetoric; they are truths based on the psychology of the mind, and are observable in all lucid writing. In fact the whole history of the development of English prose is in a way the emergence of these principles. Because the earliest writers had only a vague sense of them, they wrote in a turgid, tautological, haphazard fashion, and consequently left their ideas often obscure and confused to the minds of posterity. But gradually these principles evolved; as time went on, men, in their effort to convey to their readers exactly and completely their own feelings and ideas, bent English prose more and more to fit the psychological demands of human minds. The degree to which each writer succeeded in this aim has determined his place in the history of English prose. Thus today successful authors consciously or unconsciously adapt their productions to these mental characteristics of human beings; it was rhetoricians, however, who observed and codified the method under a threefold head.

Consequently the student must always remember that the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis are derived from the way in which the human mind works. For instance, our minds can pay attention to only one thing at a time. It is said that some geniuses like Napoleon could dictate letters of differing import to several secretaries at once; but any normal man finds it impossible to follow simultaneously two lines of thought. Hence the writer, if he wants to make himself comprehensible to the average reader, must confine himself in writing to a single subject. If our minds were like Napoleon's, it might be possible to have articles, alternate sentences of which were on totally different subjects, such as prohibition in the United States and the latest excavations at Pompeii. But since our minds are so constituted as to be able to focus on only one thing at a time, we must confine ourselves to one subject when writing an article. In doing so, we observe the principle of unity. Similarly, the other principles are based on the way our minds operate. Coherence requires that the topics in an article should be clearly connected, running continuously without break from beginning to end; what is in our mind makes an unbroken chain; the connection between one idea or thought and another may be ridiculously trivial, associative in character, rather than logical, yet the connection does exist. One does not think about the work of the missionaries in China and then, without any transition, about the value of the franc at the present moment. Hence, in present-

ing material to a reader's mind, one must make it continuous, the transition and relation between one thought and another constantly clear, or else the reader will not be able to grasp the different aspects of one's idea. Finally, emphasis, which requires that one proportion a discussion so that the main ideas occupy more space than secondary ones and arrange it so that the beginning and end dwell on main ideas, is based on the obvious fact that what one talks about longest and what one begins and ends with remain longest in a hearer's mind.

#### IV. THE OPERATIONS INVOLVED IN EXPOSITION

The whole process of exposition or informational writing can be summarized in three words: division, arrangement, and definition. After limiting the subject, the writer must next plan the development of it. In doing so, he makes use of the processes of division and arrangement, and so practically outlines his article. The actual writing of the theme consists in explaining or defining each aspect of the plan, i.e., the process of definition, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### V. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DIVISION AND UNITY

In division the writer separates the subject which he has just limited into its elements or subheads. In the process he should scrutinize each topic which comes into his mind, to decide whether it is really part of his subject; and after he has thought through the subject and noted its parts, he should try to make sure that he has

adequately covered the ground. Nothing extraneous should be included; nothing which is necessary should be omitted. Thus unity controls the material that may be used in the composition, as the reader may observe for himself in the following example.

#### VI. DIVISION ILLUSTRATED

Let us suppose that a student, through a novel, the cinema, or a chance remark of a history instructor, has become conscious that the inhabitants of his home town have a different attitude toward religion from that of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. Later, when in search for an expository subject for an English assignment of a thousand words, he recalls his idea and decides to limit it to "The Causes for the Decline of Church-going in the Small Town." He might then write down words or phrases which would suggest to him the following topics:

1. People in my great-grandfather's time went to church because they had little else to do. Blue laws restricted their Sunday activities.
2. Today blue laws in spirit, if not in letter, are dead.
3. The God of my grandfather was a terrible and awful being who condemned to hell all who failed to attend church.
4. Today we should call a person who holds hell-fire views "narrow-minded."
5. Science has changed our attitude toward what we call "God."
6. The twentieth century is one of material advancement and perhaps pays for its progress by losing its soul in materialism.
7. At the present time the town boasts of all kinds of clubs and societies; one hundred years ago the church was the only social center in town.
8. Today people have motor cars, radios, and other means of enjoying themselves—sources of pleasure unknown to my forefathers.



Having noted the different aspects of his idea, the student looks them over to see if he has completely surveyed his subject. Suddenly he remembers, in reviewing his topics, that what he has recorded applies not to those of Catholic faith but rather to Protestants, for the latter make up the majority of his home town. And in answering the question he next puts to himself: "Why do Protestants rather than Catholics tend to break away from the visible church?" he realizes that he has overlooked one aspect of his idea:

9. The whole history of the Protestant church has been gradually a discarding of dogma and ritual and an advance from conservatism to liberalism of thought; it is but natural the process continue even until this day.

Again the student examines his subheads—this time to test out each one as to whether it is an integral part of his main theme. When he comes upon:

4. Today we should call a person who holds hell-fire views "narrow-minded."

he realizes that topic 4 is not a cause for the decline of churchgoing, and so he eliminates it from among his topics.

#### VII. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ARRANGEMENT AND COHERENCE

When a student has jotted down all the aspects of his subject which occur to him, and when he has made sure that they include nothing irrelevant but, taken together, comprise the whole subject, then he must consider the arrangement of them. Probably many a pupil

has tried to take notes from an instructor's lecture and in the midst of his labors has been driven to despair. In the evening, he has confided to his roommate, "Professor Brown has mighty interesting material, but he's the hardest person to follow I've ever listened to." The trouble with Professor Brown's lectures is probably that he does not order his material; he does not arrange his matter *coherently*. Most human beings, including Professor Brown, think associatively. If they allow their minds to work without consciously adopting some fixed plan, one idea will suggest to them another idea; and that, another; and so on. But a writer or a lecturer cannot successfully reproduce his thoughts in this manner, for each mind has its own processes of association, which vary according to the individual. Yet there are logical processes of thought which are stable and according to which one may present one's ideas with the assurance that the reader will be fully able to follow them.

If a student has a well-trained mind, he may have utilized one of these methods in the very act of division. This statement is particularly true of those cases in which the writer has chosen a subject which lends itself to chronological treatment. Thus, in discussing a process, one would naturally take up one step after another according to the time order followed in carrying out the process itself. In other cases, however, such as in a discussion of English literature of the last half of the nineteenth century, the student may have begun on a



chronological plan, and then have discarded it, as loose and inefficient in bringing out logical relationships. For a chronological discussion of this latter subject he should substitute logical treatment, taking up the various kinds of literature under each class, viz., poetry and prose (fiction, non-fiction), with further divisions under each head, classifying works as realistic, romantic, satiric, etc. In still other cases, a writer may have decided upon a logical development of a subject, such as the effects of the industrial revolution, and yet may fear that his plan will not interest the general reader. For, though a logical presentation of such a subject might be suitable to a class in economics, it is not adapted to the average reader, who knows little of political economy. If one is appealing to the average reader—and one often is—the best basic plan would be to arrange the topics of a subject such as this so as to begin with something the reader knows, and to lead him bit by bit to an understanding of what is new to him—the arrangement known as “simple to complex.” In an explanation of the results of the industrial revolution, a student might well stress the concrete differences between life today and life before the introduction of machinery, first touching upon those which an intelligent reader might note for himself, and then passing to those the reader would not know unless he had studied the subject. Finally the writer could turn from concrete results to less tangible ones, considering the effect of the revolution on the production and distribution of wealth, and making

evident the fact that the revolution is not merely a thing of the past but something which is still going on today, still modifying our mode of life and the structure of society. In short, in choosing an arrangement, the dominant consideration is "What will hold the attention of the reader and make the subject clear to him?" Throughout the arranging of topics, the writer should have the reader in mind; he should choose a plan which will be easy for the reader to follow and which will interest him.

*Exercise 1:* For what class of readers would you design each of the following plans?

- I. The students in my university
  1. Freshmen
  2. Sophomores
  3. Juniors
  4. Seniors
- II. The students in my university
  1. Those born of American parents
  2. Those born in America of foreign parents
  3. Those of foreign birth
- III. The students in my university
  1. Christians: Protestants and Catholics
  2. Jews
  3. Those of other religions
  4. Atheists

*Exercise 2:* Would the following plans interest the average reader? Would they be understood by him? If not, substitute plans which would hold his attention and which he could follow.

- I. The value of a college education
  1. Physically
  2. Socially
  3. Economically

## II. A criticism of American newspapers

1. The results of their economic dependence upon advertisement
2. The results of their need for a wide circulation
3. The results of a public demand for sensationalism and cheap amusement

## III. A brief discussion of common diseases of the eye

1. The anatomy of the eye
2. The pathology of the eye
  - a) Diseases of the eye considered as a double organ: hemianopia, amblyopia, diplopia, etc.
  - b) Diseases which may attack one eye: of the cornea, of the sclera, of the aqueous humor, or the crystalline lens, etc.

*Exercise 3:* Suggest at least two ways of arranging four of the following subjects, i.e., apply here the teaching of section vii. Point out at the same time the advantage and disadvantage of each arrangement.

1. Our undergraduate periodicals
2. A medieval town
3. The public schools of America
4. The radio
5. Political parties in America
6. The influence of moving pictures upon American life
7. The effects of coeducation

*Exercise 4:* Write out the main topics for three of the preceding subjects, according to both ways stated in Exercise 3.

VIII. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN  
ARRANGEMENT AND EMPHASIS

When a student has decided upon some plan according to which he can arrange his topics, he should combine them, in the case of a theme of one thousand words, under three to six main heads. In a chronological development of a subject, the order of the topics (what will come first and what last) will be determined by a time order: a simple-to-complex plan will also in many cases

predetermine the order of the topics. But in a logical arrangement, and to some extent in a simple-to-complex treatment of a subject, a student should remember that the beginning and end of his article are emphatic places, and he should utilize this knowledge in placing his material effectively before his audience.

#### IX. ARRANGEMENT ILLUSTRATED

If the student will study (on pages 20 and 21) the topics of the subject we have been discussing, "The Causes for the Decline of Churchgoing in the Small Town," he will see that they naturally fall into a logical arrangement in which topics 1 and 2; topics 3, 5, and 6; topics 7 and 8; topic 9, can be grouped under four heads in some such way as the following:

I. Churchgoing is no longer compulsory as it was in Puritan times (1 and 2).

II. Churchgoing is affected by our present attitude toward religion (3, 5, and 6).

III. Churchgoing is affected by the decreasing importance of the church (7 and 8).

IV. The decrease in churchgoing is a logical outcome of the tendencies inherent in Protestantism. (9).

Obviously I is a political cause—the separation of church and state; II, a religious cause; III, a social cause; and IV, a psychological cause. After formulating the main topics, the writer examines them to see if he has arranged them emphatically. Numbers II and IV appear to him more important than I and III; so he reorders his topics in the following fashion: IV, I, III, II. Under these rearranged headings should then be

placed the subtopics concisely worded. (See pages 30-31 for finished outline.)

#### X. THE INTRODUCTION AND THE CONCLUSION

##### WHAT IS MEANT BY "AN INTRODUCTION"

Finally, before beginning to write, the student should plan his introduction and conclusion. It is true, of course, that long and elaborate introductions are not desirable. Quite properly these were burlesqued many years ago by Washington Irving in his *Knickerbocker History of New York*. But an article entirely without introduction is usually confusing to the reader, since he has no means of knowing that the first main heading is not the whole subject. All that the introduction need do is make clear the general subject which the writer is treating. The first sentence may state this, and then the body of the article may begin immediately. On the other hand, the introduction may do more: it may point out a present timeliness and importance in the subject; it may state any experience of the writer which makes him an authority on the matter; it should indicate any limitations which the writer is making in treating his subject. Obviously, such information will give the article weight in the reader's mind and make what follows clear to him.

##### WHAT IS MEANT BY "A CONCLUSION"

Similarly the writer should plan his conclusion. It is not necessary, as some people suppose, to put a summary of the main topics at the end of every article. Indeed,

such a summary has the great disadvantage of producing a formal, dull effect and should be used only to conclude long and complicated expositions and arguments. On the other hand, if an article of moderate length ends with a skilfully devised sentence or two which will not have the appearance of a summary but will recall the main points of the article, such a conclusion is always effective. The indispensable feature of a conclusion, however, is that it brings home a main topic to the reader. As the end is a place of emphasis, one should present there not a subordinate, unimportant point but a main topic which one wishes to emphasize.

*Exercise 1:* Read the first paragraph or two of five articles, noting the method of introducing the subject. Do these conform to the suggestions given above?

*Exercise 2:* Read the last paragraph or two of five articles, noting the nature of the conclusion. Do these conform to the suggestions given above?

#### WORKING OUT THE INTRODUCTION AND THE CONCLUSION

In the theme under discussion concerning the causes for the decline in church attendance, the writer might well plan to use as his introduction a contrast of a typical town church today during church service and a meeting-house in Puritan New England: the velvet cushions, the stained glass, the steam heat, the organist at his expensive organ, the sparse, well-dressed audience, on the one hand; the hard-board seats, the severity of the surroundings, the windows which let in the cold, the proctor on watch for the inattentive, the crowded, sober congregation, on the other. Such an opening, vividly worded,



might attract the attention of the reader and awaken his interest in the writer's subsequent generalization that obviously churchgoing has declined in spite of the fact that the churches have become more humanized. The student would then try to explain this condition by taking up the first of his causes.

As for the conclusion, one can find it by utilizing one of the subtopics under what was finally decided upon as the last main head: "Churchgoing is affected by our present attitude toward religion." This final division had as subtopics Nos. 3, 5, and 6 (p. 20) and one can easily see that No. 6, "The twentieth century is one of material advancement and perhaps pays for its progress by losing its soul in materialism," can be made into a telling conclusion, for it can be developed to remind the reader that many of the causes touched upon throughout the article contribute to this result.

#### XI. THE OUTLINE

When the student has thought out his division and his arrangement (including introduction and conclusion), he has made his fundamental outline. Some people do all of that work "in their heads." Others find it helpful, even indispensable, to write down the whole so as to be able to see it and refer to it as the writing proceeds. In any case, if one is working with a teacher, one will need to write the outline so as to enable the teacher to see the plan and perhaps offer suggestions for improving it. In this outline the main heads should be divided into subheads, and the whole should be ex-

pressed in complete sentences. That form may seem to cause work to the student, but it is really a help, because it makes him think out his main points precisely; and it is vastly clearer to the teacher than an outline in which the headings are merely words or phrases. Of course such an outline should not be too full, but it should read as a brief, logical summary of the composition. A good outline in *form*, *lettering*, and *indentation* should be built on the following model.

THE CAUSES FOR THE DECLINE OF CHURCHGOING IN THE  
SMALL TOWN

- I. Fewer people go to church today than in Puritan times
  - A. Today churches are luxurious but ill attended
  - B. In Puritan times churches were uncomfortable but filled
- II. The decline in churchgoing is the logical outcome of the tendencies inherent in Protestantism
  - A. The whole history of the Protestant church has been a breaking-away from authority
  - B. The decline in churchgoing may be the ultimate result of this tendency
- III. Churchgoing is no longer compulsory as it was in Puritan times
  - A. All Puritan life was restricted by blue laws
    1. See the blue laws in Reverend Samuel A. Peter's *General History of Connecticut*
    2. The Puritan Sunday was completely regulated by blue laws
  - B. Today blue laws are dead in spirit, if not in letter
- IV. Churchgoing is affected by the decreasing social importance of the church
  - A. The socials of the church gave our grandfathers enjoyment
    1. In the winters there were quilting-bees
    2. In the spring there was a church fair
    3. In the summers there were church picnics
    4. At all seasons of the year there were parties and entertainments



- B. Today we amuse ourselves in other ways
  - 1. We have motor cars and radios
  - 2. We have various social, business, and athletic clubs
- V. Churchgoing is affected by our change in attitude toward God
  - A. Some of us no longer fear not to go to church
  - B. Science has changed the attitude of some of us toward the Bible and God
  - C. The twentieth century has made us materialists<sup>1</sup>

*Exercise:* Take a subject on which you could write an article, show the processes through which you would go in order to organize it, and write the outline.

<sup>1</sup> An outline can be further subdivided at the desire of the writer; the numbering to follow is—

- I.
  - A.
    - I.
      - a) (1)
- B.

## CHAPTER III

### WRITING THE COMPOSITION (SIMPLE EXPOSITION)

#### I. HOW TO BEGIN A THEME

We have noticed that the three words which epitomize informational writing are "division," "arrangement," and "definition." When the student has in mind all his material and has planned the article, he has covered the first two processes and is ready to begin to write. The developed introduction may consist of little more than the sentences which stand in the outline; or it may be increased by the addition of details. Perhaps it will cover a single paragraph of a hundred words or so. If much explanation and development is necessary, it may extend to two paragraphs; if it is extremely brief, it may be joined with the first topic and made into one paragraph. In all cases it should be so expressed as to arouse the attention of the reader and to hold his interest in what follows.<sup>1</sup>

#### II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME BY MEANS OF DEFINITION

Writing the body of a theme consists in defining the topics of the outline. In carrying out the process of

<sup>1</sup> See pages 28 and 29 for the contents of the introduction of the model outline.

definition, however, the student does not consult a dictionary; rather he goes through a definitive process of thought, i.e., by examples and illustrations, by amplification and limitation of topics, by demarcation of them, he makes his concepts sharp and clear in the reader's mind. In short, a writer takes a topic from his outline and explains just what he means by it, giving concrete examples of its truth, facts, or statistics to prove it, comparisons with known facts to make it clear.

### III. DEFINITION ILLUSTRATED

One might, for example, define in several ways topic III, A, 1, in the preceding chapter: "See the blue laws in Reverend Samuel A. Peter's *General History of Connecticut*." A writer might cite in detail blue laws mentioned in the history; he might characterize them in a general way and stress their inconsistency with the New England love of freedom; he might point out that the blue laws described in the history are so ridiculous and extreme that early historians thought them spiteful Tory lies, but that later scholars have shown that many of them with slight modifications are to be found, if not in New Haven statute books, still in the statute books of various New England states; or a writer might draw an interesting parallel between the blue laws of Puritan times and those today of Zion City, Illinois. Through one or more of these ways, a student could define the topic, could make definite to his reader what he means by blue laws, their significance, and their nature.

*Exercise 1:* Discuss various ways of defining three of the following subtopics.

1. Atheism is a disease of youth.
2. The universities spend their endowments upon the erection of buildings rather than upon the increase of professorial salaries and the founding of scholarships.
3. In the city, middle-class people are moving from houses into flats and from flats into small apartments and apartment hotels.
4. Women are men's inferiors physically.
5. A college education is a waste of time.

*Exercise 2:* Define in a paragraph or two a subtopic in a theme which you could write.

#### IV. PARAGRAPHING

##### HOW LONG OUGHT A PARAGRAPH TO BE?

One can easily see that the defining of topics is connected with the problem of paragraphing, for a paragraph is a miniature composition which usually develops one topic of the outline. Here one may make a foolish statement: the paragraph should not be too short or too long. That is, paragraphs of the sort found in some city newspapers are not paragraphs in any logical sense, for when every paragraph consists merely of a sentence there is of course no distinction between paragraphs and sentences. Further, if the reader sees many paragraph indentations on a page, he is likely to suppose that the style and structure are loose, not well organized. On the other hand, if he reads two pages or more without a paragraph-stop, he will feel breathless and exhausted by the long-continued reasoning. Consequently it may be said that, as a rule, paragraphs should be not shorter than half a page or longer than a

page and a half. Absurd as it may seem, the implication of that statement is true: i.e., paragraphs in long hand are shorter than paragraphs in typewritten form; and the latter are shorter than those in printed discourse. In developing a topic into a paragraph, the student should then watch its length, and if he finds his discussion becoming too long for one paragraph, he should divide it into two or more paragraphs; if the expanded topic results in too short a paragraph, the student should add to it a closely related topic.

THE PARAGRAPH AND THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF UNITY,  
COHERENCE, AND EMPHASIS

As in the case of the composition as a whole, the paragraph should conform to the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis: (*a*) it should discuss all essential phases of its topic and should not include anything extraneous to the topic; (*b*) it should be arranged according to a plan and should keep that plan clear by means of transitional expressions; (*c*) it should be proportioned so as to give most space to its main ideas, and should be arranged so as to end on an important idea.<sup>1</sup>

CONNECTION BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

Finally, the logical relation between each paragraph and that which precedes it should be made clear by means of transitional expressions. Every paragraph in

<sup>1</sup> What is meant by (*a*) and (*c*) ought to be perfectly clear to any careful student; (*b*), paragraph coherence, is treated at greater length after the following discussion: "Connection between Paragraphs."

the article bears on the whole subject, and every paragraph stands in the place which it occupies as part of the logical plan of the whole. Now this logical relation to what has gone before must always be clear to the reader. One means of making the relation of all parts clear is to state in the introduction the main divisions of the subject, and, as each topic comes up, introduce it with a numeral (first, secondly, etc.) This plan is formal and "wooden," but it is much better than no connection at all, and in some complicated articles it is even advisable. Better than this method is the more subtle one of using transitional expressions. These are retrospective in effect, i.e., they look back at what has just been expressed and join it to what is to follow. They may consist in individual words ("moreover," "nevertheless," "however," etc.), in phrases ("on the other hand," "in other cases," etc.), in clauses in sentences ("whether that plan be best or not," "now that we understand the present conditions," etc.), or in entire sentences. For the most part the transitional expression should stand at the beginning of the new paragraph rather than at the end of the preceding one because in the latter position it weakens the emphasis of the old paragraph.

#### CONNECTION BETWEEN SENTENCES WITHIN EACH PARAGRAPH

In general the transitional expressions used to connect paragraphs are more elaborate than those used to connect sentences within the paragraph because the gap which must be bridged in thought is wider between

paragraphs than between sentences developing the same paragraph topic. In the latter the relation is often so clear that no formal expression of it is needed. When explicit connection is necessary, sometimes inversion of a following sentence is sufficient to make clear its relation to the preceding one. Repetition of words is also an effective device for binding sentences together. In some cases simple demonstratives such as "this," "these," "that," "those," are sufficient to secure paragraph coherence; in other cases transitional words ("also," "however," "consequently," etc.) or short transitional phrases ("of course," "in fact," etc.) are better. Whatever the device used, throughout the theme the thought should flow from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph without a single break.

*Exercise 1:* Discuss definitely how the following paragraphs violate one or more of the three principles. Rewrite the second and the third paragraphs.

Ethical culture is not concerned with problems which form the stock in trade of the preachers of conventional religion. It has no creed; its followers are free to accept the ideas of God, immortality, divinity of Jesus, or any others, or reject them as they see fit. The societies meet on Sunday and there are lectures by the leader. These lectures are given on questions of public interest in all fields: political, economic, scientific, social and cultural.

Gandhi's first reforms were social reforms. These social reforms benefited the agricultural workers. His work to help the cause of the "untouchables" and of women shows this social interest. He instituted a new educational system to reintroduce Eastern civilization. All these attempted social reforms directly hinge on his religious principle of the unity of man. In his social work Gandhi combines religion, humanity, patriotism. Gandhi is undoubtedly a master of spiritual power.



To exclude undesirable immigrants has always been America's policy. We have excluded Chinese since 1882. East Indians and Koreans have also been excluded. Other countries have found it necessary to exclude the Japanese. Canada restricts them by means of a head tax so large that practical exclusion results. Australia has restricted Japanese unreservedly since 1901. South Africa and New Zealand exclude them.

*Exercise 2:* On pages 35 and 36 note that the words underlined are the means by which the writers have secured coherence between paragraphs and coherence within the paragraph. Take two consecutive pages from this textbook and in a similar fashion signify how coherence has been secured.

*Exercise 3:* Rewrite the following theme.

#### AN AMERICAN GIRL

The world will rejoice with the United States because Ruth Elder and her flying companion, George Haldeman, have been rescued.

Their attempt to reach Europe at this season of the year was spectacular. Had they succeeded, fame and fortune would have been their reward.

Nevertheless, it was an unwise and foolhardy enterprise. Airplanes are not yet made so perfectly as to withstand every strain of a long flight.

A trivial defect in the oil line apparently brought the expedition to a sudden end, fortunately within rescuing distance of a steamship.

Transatlantic flying needs something more than a perfect plane and smooth-functioning engine.

It needs, in addition, an unerring sense of direction.

Lindberg possessed that to a remarkable degree. It was probably born in him and reached perfection in the night flights on the mail plane lines, flights that were accomplished thru blinding fogs, blizzards and rains.

Lindberg won out, and Chamberlin and Byrd followed because they had mechanical equipment PLUS the proper human instincts and training.

They won out, too, because they took advantage of the best

season of the year, altho even then, they found the weather perilous, almost to fatality.

The pioneers have proved that the thing can be done, and that is enough for the present.

Ruth Elder's coming to sea far off her course should be a warning to others of the immense perils that confront flyers over the ocean.

May other adventurous flyers take this lesson to heart and abandon their proposed flights over the ocean to Europe.

There have been enough lives sacrificed already, and miracles such as the Elder-Haldeman rescue are not performed every day.

*Exercise 4:* (a) What is the central idea of each paragraph in the following theme entitled "In a Railroad Passenger Yard"? (b) Is each paragraph a unified whole? (c) Underline the means by which coherence is secured within each paragraph. (d) Criticize each paragraph from the point of view of emphasis. (e) Underline the means by which coherence is secured between paragraphs.

IN A RAILROAD PASSENGER YARD

When I was in railroad work, I frequently had occasion to meet special trains coming in from the East and to offer what assistance I could both to passengers and railroad employees in order that there might be as little delay as possible to the train and no unnecessary inconvenience to the passengers. These special trains, which usually came from some one of the large eastern cities and were bound for Colorado or California, were not carried into any railroad station at Chicago, but, to save as much time as possible, were carried directly to the passenger yard. What happened to them there always interested me and perhaps may interest the reader, although it is a subject better suited to a moving picture film than to the pen.

A long time before the train is due, the train men have made the yard ready for it. A special stretch of track, for example, has been reserved, a stretch which is easily accessible to the workmen and so located that a minimum of switching is required to get the train out of the yard. Also there are squads of men all ready to look after the water, ice, wheels, brakes, and other mechanical parts of the train, and to clean the cars, for the entire train must be carefully gone over in every detail before it can continue its journey.

Consequently when the train pulls in, this small army of men attack it from one end to the other almost before it has come to a standstill, and for nearly an hour the work goes on at white heat.

The water squad fill the water tanks, which are on top of the cars, using long hoses, almost like firemen. The ice squad, for their part, fill the coolers in each car from a large galvanized iron wagon which they lead from car to car. At the same time, the mechanics go along tapping every wheel to see that it rings true and testing every brake to see that it works smoothly. In the meanwhile the electrician is connecting the dynamo in the baggage car with the new engine which at Chicago is always attached to the train. When new cars, moreover, are put into the train, he must see that the lamps are of the proper voltage to carry the current generated by the dynamo; if by any chance or error they are not, the workmen remove the ill-chosen car and substitute another amid great excitement, numerous commands, and much rushing back and forth. But no matter what happens, the cleaners keep hard at work inside and out, doing all they can to improve the appearance of the train without greatly discommoding the passengers. Finally the train must be cut in two, and the dining car, which has been carefully stocked and shines resplendent, placed in the middle.

When all these things have been done and a final inspection has been made, the train is ready to continue her journey and the men to sit on the fence and to watch her pull away with a feeling of relief. In the day time, the sight of this activity is interesting as human activity always is, but at night when the work has to be done in semi-darkness with only a big arc light to break the blackness, the whole effect is shadowy, unreal and fascinating.

#### V. THE FINISHED ARTICLE

##### IS IT CONCRETE IN PRESENTATION?

In the whole development of the composition the writer must bear in mind the necessity of concreteness. The purpose of exposition and argument is to make ideas clear, and ideas are abstractions—not objects seen, heard, or touched, but judgments, opinions, mental conclusions. As in all cases it is the mind which grasps ideas, it might be supposed that the reader's mind could comprehend easily the thoughts of the writer. But it cannot because our minds are machines to transfer sen-

sations and experiences into ideas, conceptions, judgments. Our minds are meant to work in that way and can work in no other. Hence the writer stands a much better chance of making ideas clear to the reader's mind if he utilizes that fact and presents them concretely, giving examples, citing some of the experiences which have caused him to reach his conclusions, quoting statistics or evidence derived from authorities, etc. A concrete presentation of matter has, moreover, this additional advantage. Language by means of which we convey thoughts to others can express abstract ideas only ambiguously; our abstract words are all relative in value, so that at different times we mean quite different ideas by words like "good," "bad," "rich," "poor," "courage," "honor." In view of what has been said, it is best then for a writer who desires to be understood easily by his reader to present all concepts in a concrete manner. The greatest of all ethical teachers, Jesus of Nazareth, realized this fact, for he made known his ethical system, not by an abstract discussion of the final good and the means by which the average man might attain it, but by definite examples and vivid language. By the parables and such sayings as "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," he taught moral truths so concretely and effectively that once heard they are not forgotten.

*Exercise:* Compare the two paragraphs printed below. Comment upon their effectiveness.

From a perusal of the science of anthropology one learns that humans resemble each other physically and mentally and are interdependent in their pursuit of happiness. One must think of society

organically and not mechanically and that we are part of an organic whole. In all vital functions or processes, humans are connected into a whole with mutually dependent units. The individual is but part of an organized body with connected interrelated parts sharing a common life—which we call society.<sup>1</sup>

The Social Me.—A man's social me is the recognition which he gets from his mates. We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met "cut us dead," and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.<sup>2</sup>

#### IS IT CLEAR?

Finally we may note that the essential test of expository writing is—is it *clear*? Logical arrangement, definite statements and concrete examples generally suffice to give clearness to an article; nevertheless, it is always advisable to try the article by inducing some person of the sort for whom it is intended to read it. Any misunderstanding which the reader may disclose, the writer should regard as almost sure evidence of a flaw in his work and remove it by means of more explicit statements or concrete examples. In addition to clearness, interest is a desirable feature of any writing, but it is not essential. Indeed, many expository and argu-

<sup>1</sup> From a student's theme.

<sup>2</sup> William James, *Psychology* (Henry Holt & Co. 1904), p. 179.

mentative subjects cannot be made interesting to an indifferent reader. The best that one can hope is that, if a reader who is potentially interested in the subject picks up the article, he may find it attractive throughout. The main means of making an article attractive are a lively, vivid style, concrete examples, anecdotes, and bits of narration and description.

#### VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR THEMES

Subjects which students can use for themes are not hard to find; there are plenty of topics on which they can write, if they but look for them. Subjects, for instance, can be derived from courses. But in using a subject suggested by a course, a writer must remember that a summary of a professor's lecture or of a chapter from a reference book does not usually make a good theme unless the material either in itself or in its presentation interests the student and makes him aware of unnoticed aspects of life, nice distinctions between ideas, subtle shades of character, and strange wonders of the earth of which he has hitherto been unconscious. On the other hand, whatever he hears in a lecture, listens to in a classroom discussion, or learns from a textbook which appeals to his emotions, to his imagination, to his mind, and awakens in him mental enthusiasm—that fact or idea is a good subject for a theme. Because of this interest, the student, in developing his theme, will contribute something of his own to the discussion; i.e., he will illustrate his point with examples from his own



knowledge or experience, he will apply a theory to a particular field with which he is acquainted or will give additional evidence to support it.

Consequently, although the following subjects are divided into three heads—subjects derived from courses; subjects derived from courses and experience; subjects derived from experience—such a division is arbitrary. To a subject suggested by a lecture or by his reading in connection with a course, a student must add some of his own experience, whether it be mental or empirical, so that his theme may take on the color of his personality. On the other hand, subjects which spring from experience often include a theory or an idea which the student has learned in class and modified, rejected, or affirmed by testing its value in real life. Even a subject which seems to come wholly from a student's experience will reflect, as the student develops it, his mental training, his knowledge, and his assimilation of what he has read and been taught.

#### I. SUBJECTS DERIVED FROM COURSES<sup>1</sup>

- |                      |                                                             |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| (History, economics) | 1. The differences between trade-unions and medieval guilds |
|                      | 2. Causes of the War of 1812                                |
| (Chemistry)          | 3. The pasteurization of milk                               |
| (Bacteriology)       | 4. Methods of immunization                                  |
| (Music)              | 5. The building of a good symphony program                  |
|                      | 6. What is <i>bel canto</i> ?                               |

<sup>1</sup> It should be understood that students are not expected to select subjects from the following list and write on them. The subjects are intended merely as *suggestions* of the sort of topics which may be used.



- (Economics) 7. Objections to a minimum wage<sup>1</sup>
- 8. The labor-union in America
- (Law) 9. The weakness of trial by jury<sup>1</sup>
- (Education) 10. The purpose of kindergarten training
- 11. Reading tests
- (Art) 12. Cimabue's position in the history of painting
- (English, art, history) 13. The renaissance background of Brown-  
ing's *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*
- (Anthropology) 14. The truth about race superiority

II. SUBJECTS DERIVED FROM COURSES AND EXPERIENCE

- (Sociology) 15. The children's department in Hull-House
- (Art, education) 16. The value of good illustrations in juvenile books
- 17. Pottery-making
- (Education) 18. The disadvantages of the project method<sup>1</sup>
- (Medicine) 19. Hypochondriacs: the relation between mental attitudes and disease
- 20. Vaccination
- 21. Vivisection
- (History, economics) 22. The disadvantages of a democratic form of government<sup>2</sup>

III. SUBJECTS DERIVED FROM EXPERIENCE

SUBJECTS DERIVED FROM THE CINEMA

- 23. The difference between the screen and the stage
- 24. The qualities of a good cinema actor
- 25. The third dimension in the cinema
- 26. What the aim of a good cinema production should be
- 27. The monotony of plots (or of ideas) in the "movies"

<sup>1</sup> Articles on these subjects will not be argument if the writer does not himself assume an attitude on the subject but merely explains the contentions made.

AN EXPLANATION OF A BELIEF<sup>1</sup>

28. The disadvantages of being born rich
29. Our sentimental attitude toward motherhood
30. The advantages of the Continental system of marriage
31. My belief in immortality (or a particular creed)

AN ABSTRACT IDEA<sup>1</sup>

32. Fear—the greatest human handicap
33. Tolerance
34. Radicalism

## AN EDITORIAL ON A CURRENT PROBLEM

35. The failure of prohibition<sup>2</sup>
36. The failure of the Dawes plan
37. Preparedness<sup>2</sup>
38. Politics and the public school

## VII. EXAMPLES OF SIMPLE EXPOSITION

## THE MINNIN'-MANNIE

The iron-ore miner of upper Michigan is a type of God-fearing, honest man. Cornish, as a rule, he is perfectly fearless in the light of day, and at night also, as long as he is "on surface." Above ground he will laugh to scorn a ghost and is loud in his contempt of any one who believes such nonsense. Yet let him don his working clothes and descend into the dark, wet pit, and he becomes a different man. Down where millions of tons of earth are heaped above his head, where the air is thick with reeking moisture and the smell of rotted wood, he is a primeval creature, lurking in the caves of the pre-historic world, a being, fearing the slightest noise, a man who starts with fright at his own shadow thrown in some fantastic shape against a pillar of rock. He fears the noises, he fears the shadows, but most of all he fears the "Minnin'-mannie."

<sup>1</sup> The subjects under these heads must be developed as concretely as factual subjects. Reread section V, on page 40: "The finished article. Is it concrete in presentation?"

<sup>2</sup> See footnote on page 45.

The young Cornish laborer who leaves his home and comes to America to join his friends in the iron mines of northern Michigan has never heard of the "Minnin'-mannie." He has never even seen an iron mine; he knows nothing of the miles of wet, winding passages in the depths of the earth. Yet one day he finds himself with his friends, shoulder to shoulder, in an iron cage sinking into the depths of the earth. Since he works well, he is soon put on "private," working at the "head" of the drift all alone. Proud to be placed where a good worker is needed, he happily takes his new position.

Sometimes during his work he stops to fill his pipe; then one day he will pause in this slight operation to listen in the darkness to the steady, eternal drip—drip—drip—drip down the black drift. Quickly he fulfills his original intention and turns eagerly to his work with a slight change in his features. At first such a pause in the darkness is rare, but gradually it becomes more and more frequent. Soon he also shudders and jumps at sounds and things at which he had laughed before. He still laughs, of course, but it is a different laugh.

Then one day it comes. He is wholly alone and working hard, noisily, singing the while as has been his habit of late. As he stops suddenly to wipe his perspiring face, his hand is arrested in mid-air, for again the spell of the pit is upon him. Drip—drip—drip—drip down the long tunnels with a splash now and then as a piece of earth falls in; drip—drip—that ceaseless, eternal drip will still be dripping when he is an old man, and even after he is dead and buried. With a shudder he starts to resume his work and then stops, for he hears footsteps approaching down the drift. He is glad to have company and peers into the gloom to welcome the newcomer. Splash—splash, it comes, wading knee deep in water, and the rocks take up the echo, splash—splash. Soon he will see it, for it is near now. Strange that it does not carry a bundle! On it comes until it is within ten feet of him, and yet nothing or no one is visible. Now it is past and splashes away into the wall of rock on which the miner had been working—splashes straight into the rock as though it were another drift.

And the miner—where is he? Flattened back against the wall of the cavern, his eyes staring and wild, his every muscle quivering, he stands as if turned to stone. The drift is six feet wide; he surely would have known if a person had gone by. His mind reels, and he repeats out loud the phrase: "If a *person* had gone by." The men at

the shaft's mouth do not laugh at his white, drawn face when it appears above the ladder's top. Without questioning him, they know.

"Aye, Jackie! See the Minnin'-mannie, 'ave 'e?"

#### FAITH

For the first time in my life, I am in a synagogue, in the house of my fathers. On the platform burn the candles in the huge seven-branched candlesticks; on the pulpit lies the Torah in its velvet wrappings with golden tassels; overhead is an inscription in the curious Hebrew characters; and around me are faces bearing the unmistakable stamp of Israel. Then the rabbi comes forward and begins to read the prescribed service.

As I listen, I recall how strange has been my religious experience. I think of my childhood spent in a town where ours was the only Jewish family. Religion was a thing very far away from me then, for my father and mother did not interest me in the doctrines of my race, as they considered religion an unimportant and insignificant factor in life. Thus I have grown up without any beliefs and have had to face the inevitable questions, the whys and wherefores of existence, alone. Very early my love of nature brought me to realize deeply these questions and to wonder at the mysterious order and harmony about me. In childhood I first asked myself, "What power makes such wonders possible?" At last in high school, science brought me an answer and satisfied my mind with her explanations. Yet my heart said, "Science explains nothing. It only adds to the mystery. Does it explain a flower to say it has so many stamens and so many petals, and belongs to such and such a class?" Thus my reason and my heart have ever been at war so that sometimes the one and sometimes the other has been triumphant.

Today as I search deeper into the realms of science and of knowledge, I realize more and more the littleness of human wisdom and the necessity of acknowledging some higher power, which governs all things. Of my own accord I have learned something of the past of my people and have found in their very history the proof that God exists. I have not been able to study their constant preservation through persecutions and humiliations of all kinds without concluding that there must be some divine protection behind them. Empires have fallen, nations have passed away, and still the Jew lives on, the same today as in the time of Moses. In the ghetto on Friday evening, the Jews cease all work at sunset, spread the table

with a clean cloth and new dishes, light the Sabbath candles, and say the prayer which divides the Sabbath from the week days just as they have done for centuries past. Other things change; yet the Jew has never changed, for his faith is in God, who is changeless. In the strange chant which ends the service of the Passover, he acknowledges this truth:—a seemingly childish tale of the cat who ate the kid, the dog who bit the cat and down through the stick, the fire, the water, the cow, the slaughterer, down to the Angel of Death and to the Lord who slew the Angel of Death. All things pass away, but the Lord alone endures.

All these reflections pass through my mind as I sit in the synagogue. The rabbi is saying Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, and here and there over the congregation, the mourners stand with bowed heads. The sound of ancient Hebrew falls upon my ears, and the words, though I understand them not, sound strangely familiar. As old as the religion itself they are and inseparably connected with it, and as I listen I feel that I am closer to real faith than I have ever been.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLANNING AND WRITING THE COMPOSITION (SIMPLE NARRATION)

#### I. SOURCES OF NARRATIVE INTEREST

##### UNUSUAL EVENTS

As in the case of simple exposition, so with simple narration, the subject matter should come from the student's own experience. It is inadvisable for the inexperienced student immediately to try his hand at fiction, because the writing of fiction is an art like painting or music and like them requires training and experience. But it lies within the ability of any intelligent student with a little practice to narrate in an effective way a true event drawn from his own experience. Yet when such a suggestion is made, many a student will say at once, "I can't write a narrative from my own experience because nothing interesting has ever happened in my life." In making such a complaint, the objector is right in assuming that a narrative should be interesting, but wrong in believing that only extraordinary occurrences are worth writing about. To be sure, one of the greatest sources of interest in narration is striking, unusual events—such adventures as the heroes of Stevenson and Conrad have—and the average student in looking back over his past life will rightly



find there nothing comparable to such imagined happenings. Moreover, even if an inexperienced writer has participated in a spectacular event or a great catastrophe, such as a flood, a fire, or a tragic automobile accident, the handling of such material calls for more descriptive ability than the student as yet possesses. Hence, until he has had practice in description and simple narration, he should avoid them.

#### "IDEAS" AND CHARACTER

Besides remarkable incidents, there are, however, other kinds of narrative interest quite as important. Among them, two of the most significant are "ideas" and character. From a consideration of ideas spring "problem novels," like Rebecca West's *The Judge*, Willa Cather's *The Lost Lady*, and many of the novels of George Gissing, as well as plays like Galsworthy's *The Silver Box*, *Justice*, or even Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (a study of the effect of unscrupulous ambition on the lives of two people). Though it is possible for a clever, sophisticated student to manipulate a simple reminiscence so as to bring it within this category, yet, in recalling a past event as possible material for simple narrative, the average student is not likely to see in it such an appeal to interest. Nevertheless, any student can find an event in his past experience in which there is character interest, whether the hero be himself, one of his relatives, or the family next door. Moreover, in utilizing material in such a way, he is drawing upon one of the greatest



sources of interest in narrative, for readers perhaps are more interested in the characters and the lives of people than in any other one thing. We are all very curious as to what life really means to other people; and when a person tells us about some incident in his life (an incident which he remembers because it had significance to him at the time it occurred) with *enough vividness to make it and its effect upon him real* to us, we are bound to become interested. This is the kind of thing we tell about in conversation: intuitively we expect it to interest our hearers, and it will do so if we make it real to them.

## II. MYSELF AS THE HERO OF A NARRATIVE

### A SIMPLE INCIDENT

If the student decides to have himself the center of interest in his narrative, just what sorts of incidents have happened to him which will make his character real and entertaining to the reader? Anything which stands out in his memory because it affected him strongly at the time: his first experience of school, his first chastisement, any incident which aroused the student to a consciousness of some feature of the life about him, any happening which marked the beginning of an important interest or ambition. All readers have been children and are still interested in the mental life of children. Hence, if a person tells incidents from his childhood (always *emphasizing the effect upon himself* at the time), he is sure to appeal to his readers. And every student's mem-

ory is stocked with such material for narration; he can easily remember events not only of his childhood but also of his adolescence and of his more recent years, which would entertain the reader. Even an account of a day which is typical of a period in one's life can be interesting if it reveals what one's mental as well as physical life was like. As generalized narration is usually too abstract to seem real, the student should tell of a particular day, one in which no great departure from the general routine of life occurred. Moreover, he should indicate what went on in his mind as well as what he actually did: every day of our lives we think and dream as well as do certain tasks. The following themes by students are examples of brief, personal reminiscences.

#### ONE CHRISTMAS

The dry, white snow crunched under my feet; the cold reddened my cheeks until they matched my scarlet bonnet. As I walked through the still darkness under the black, twisted trees beside my mother, I chattered happily to her, for it was Christmas and she was taking me to a mass before the sun was awake. Suddenly the old church loomed up against the blue velvet sky and I stopped my chatter to climb the steps in silence. While we passed through the dimly lit vestibule, I shut my eyes tightly.

"Tell me when, Mummy."

We walked solemnly down the long, dark aisle; then "Now," said Mummy.

My eyes popped open. The altar blazed with light, a glowing spot in the thick, overpowering blackness. The old oak beams above threw on the carvings of the altar mysterious shadows that twisted and turned like living creatures. The carvings were probably depictions of the saints and their miracles, but I was an Irish child and to me they were little folk of the other world.

"Fairies, you glad it's Christmas, too?" I murmured.

Of course, the fairies heard me; and, as the candles burned more

brightly their faces grew clearer; the tall thin ones along the choir stalls bent their heads and smiled.

"Awight," I whispered.

The priest's voice began the chant; the Latin words rose and fell, now ominous, now appealing; the flames flickered and danced. Then the prayer grew softer while the organ pealed more loudly. Far away, almost in Heaven it seemed to me, a boy sang. As the voice soared higher and higher, little shivers ran through me and I held my breath. At the highest note the flames and even the fairies stood still; the faces of the people, lifted to the light, glowed tensely. Then the voice still rose one note—clear and pure. My heart thumped so loud that I couldn't breathe.

Then there was silence. I caught my breath trembling; the carved fairies again began to dance. The mass went on.

#### MY FIRST DUCK HUNT

At last, near dawn, we came to the marshland abounding in stagnant pools and woody rushes. As we wound our way westward in the grey dawn, the morning stars grew faint and a half-moon ring of light broadened in the east. A piercing west wind made thin ice crystals upon the pools quiver and grate. For some time we had been walking in silence; finally my companion chose a favorable blind at the end of the lake and, speaking to me softly, he bade me crouch down in the rushes. Together, we sat shivering and watching the sky for the flight of a duck drove. The dank ground and undergrowth smelt sweet and earthy. Across the way from us in another blind two other hunters lay hidden; we could see bits of their clothes and could hear the "quack, quack" of the two decoys placed near them.

Finally a flock of ducks appeared high above us; in a tantalizing fashion, they circled about and then flew away southward. The damp wind grew more penetrating, so that my companion and I grew purple with cold. We shivered for perhaps twenty minutes or so when another drove appeared on the horizon, flying straight toward our blind. Breathless with excitement, I flung myself flat upon the ground and before my companion could take aim, "Crack, Crack," barked my gun. Then with fear I lifted my head, for I knew what my companion would say if I had missed and yet had put to flight the whole drove. But I had had luck with me; one duck lagged behind the rest. It careened and, turning a series of somersaults, it fell to the ground. My companion ran, picked up the fallen duck and

brought it to me. On handling it, I felt more like a nauseated murderer than a successful sportsman. Of course, we took the duck home and my companion ate of it—but not I. Even now, a well-plucked, ice-packed duck in a butcher shop, brings back a picture of my first shot, the limp head, the bright soft feathers sticky with blood.

#### A MORE EXTENSIVE NARRATIVE

In a somewhat more extensive theme, an account of a short period of one's life, with an indication of the formative influences to which one was subject at the time and the resulting growth of tastes, interest, character, will make an interesting narrative. Or one can trace the development of a minor interest in one's life as in a sport, a subject or an avocation (like stamp-collecting, gardening). Anything which is vital to one's self can be made into effective narration if one will make the reader see its significance to one's self, but all such autobiographical subjects, chosen for *simple* narration, should be circumscribed in matter and obvious in point. Subjects such as "The Influence of Mr. S — on My Life," "My Years of Adolescence," "From Nick Carter to Conrad," "My Childhood on Main Street," "The Rise and Fall of the Great Order of 'X.Y.Z.'" (the secret club of one's boyhood gang), produce better short narratives than the more ambitious ones suggested in chapter ix.

#### SUBJECTS TO BE AVOIDED

There are, however, some experiences which the student may suppose to be good material for narration but which are not worth developing. Among these are trips which have not had a marked effect on the person's

life. Only a master of the art of writing can make an ordinary trip (to New York or Niagara Falls, for example) interesting, for only such a writer can give to the reader the features of real interest in it, i.e., the sensations experienced and the scenes which thrilled the observer. The average student makes such accounts intolerably boring because he can give only the insignificant details of going to the train, eating in the diner, sleeping in the Pullman, arriving at the station, finding a hotel, etc. And when he gets the reader to Niagara Falls or New York City, he is likely to say "the scene was indescribable," and then tell all the unimportant details of the journey home. Similarly, catastrophes such as floods, fires, automobile accidents, are likely to call for more descriptive ability than the student possesses until he has had extended practice in simple narration and description. Hence, he should avoid them and instead choose simple incidents which at the time of occurrence meant something to him.

### III. MY NEIGHBOR AS THE HERO

Another source of interest which is within the range of almost all students is that of character in people we have known. Nearly everyone has been acquainted with a person who had a peculiar, striking individuality. An incident illustrative of such a person's character, or the chronicle of his life during a certain day, makes an interesting simple narrative. In such a narrative the writer should make the character so real to the reader that the

latter would recognize the person if he met him on the street. The writer should realistically describe the person's appearance, anything unusual in his attire, his mannerisms in speech and movement, and, if he was an effective talker, give bits of his conversation. But in handling a character, the student must make his hero true to life, for an over-idealized character will not seem real to the reader. Even as children most of us disliked the "Elsie Dinsmore Books" and believed in the young Elsie as little as we believe today in the average heroine of a cinema production. As human beings, we are interested in *human* beings, not in idealized patterns—in human temptations and spiritual victories, in human aspirations and frailties, in human possibilities and limitations.

#### IV. THE ACTUAL WRITING OF THE NARRATIVE

In narration of this simple sort, sentences and paragraphs should be shorter and less formal than those of exposition, and the words used should be those of ordinary life (not too colloquial, however) rather than those of books. Conversations should be modeled upon what one hears people say every day, but they should be more clever, concise, and pointed than the conversation about one. Every speech, moreover, should be in keeping with the character speaking; every speech should also have a definite function in the story either of explaining something which needs explanation, of helping the narrative to progress, or of revealing character. It should perhaps



be added that in using an incident from childhood, a student must *not* develop the narrative in the style and language of childhood. Any conversation recorded should be consistent with the age of the speakers, to be sure, but otherwise the style of the narrative should be mature, for nothing is more distressing than an imitation of infantile style.

According to literary custom, every new speaker begins a new paragraph. Because these paragraphs have as their aim a dramatic presentation of the event and the characters concerned, they need not be constructed necessarily according to the rules of unity, emphasis, and coherence. The writer, for example, may want to present the manner of speech of a person who always talks incoherently, or to make real the incoherence which overtakes his hero in a moment of stress and excitement. Aside from conversation, however, the paragraphs of a narrative should be well constructed. Each paragraph should observe the rhetorical rules for paragraph structure and should be coherently connected with the preceding and following paragraphs.<sup>1</sup>

*Exercise 1:* (a) Record the actual words of a conversation which you have heard. (b) Rewrite it so that it may be used for conversation in a narrative, i.e., so that it is "more clever, concise, and pointed than the actual conversation."

*Exercise 2:* Take the following suggestion and develop it into four conversations as a novelist would. At the same time, by means of narrative and descriptive inserts suggest the physical and mental characteristics of the speakers and the setting in which each conversation takes place.

<sup>1</sup> Review in the preceding chapter under "Paragraphing" the following sections: "The Paragraph and the Three Principles of Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis"; "Connection between Paragraphs"; "Connection between Sentences within Each Paragraph."



The day after commencement, the girl generally regarded as the most unattractive in the senior class and the most popular senior boy are married, to the surprise of all their classmates: (*a*) as told by friends of the man; (*b*) as told by friends of the woman; (*c*) as told by a teacher of the young couple to his wife; and (*d*) as told by the man after the marriage to his father.

## V. SPECIMENS OF SIMPLE NARRATION

### MERRY, MERRY CHRISTMAS!

At ten o'clock the store closed its doors to the last straggling Christmas shopper. At half-past ten the clerks and the buyers, the inspectors, and the superintendent had abandoned the place to the night watchmen. Only in the basement, two floors down, the rush and bustle continued. The last pieces of glassware were being wrapped in excelsior, the last decorated boxes protected with thin striped paper, the last trucks full of parcels pushed to the elevators that carried them up to the great motor-trucks in the street. The men for their part were too tired to be glad that their strained, overworked week of long, dull hours was almost over. For some of them it meant the last night of an assured job, and these lagged, reluctant to finish the little work that was left before they should get their time cards. For others it meant that the feverish rush of Christmas season was at an end, and in their anticipation of the relaxation of the next week, they too lagged. Some worked with a stupid steadiness, too exhausted to think of the week past or the week to come.

Twelve o'clock came. The belts that carried the parcels about the big, noisy shipping-room ceased their whirring. No more heavy trucks were pushed over the stone floor. The nasal monotones of the "callers" died away. To the basement, two floors down, came a sudden silence. It was broken by a sleepy-voiced packer, who was passing the office where sat "the boss," gray-faced and heavy-lidded, wearily examining his delivery lists.

"Merry, merry Christmas, boss," said the packer stifling a yawn.

### SOUVENIRS

Our trolley clanged its way slowly down a quiet residence street. Though it was only eight o'clock, the street was deserted except for a sentry, who paced between two lamp-posts. Suddenly

he stood alert, then turned and ran to the side street which we had just crossed. We caught a roar of angry voices, the hurrying of many feet, and beneath the arc light at the next corner a throng of struggling men and women swept into sight. The car stopped to take on a frightened passenger, and the wild mob surged past us, hatless, fighting, cursing—blocked the track ahead and rushed on to the corner, where it seemed to stop. A man's voice rose above the uproar for an instant, but was drowned in the mob's hoarse cries of "Down." Above the din we heard the crash of splintered wood, a woman's scream. The shouts doubled in fury. Then from behind, the quick tramp of marching feet, and the militia passed—we feared too late. For a moment silence. Then the throng surged on. A man boarded the car, white faced and breathless. "Another poor nigger!" he muttered. "And the madmen broke pieces from the tree for souvenirs," he said and shuddered.

The track ahead was clear now, and the car sped on. As we passed the corner a dead tree gleamed white in the light from the street lamp, and from a branch above the walk there dangled a ghastly broken end of rope.

## CHAPTER V

### CORRECT SENTENCES

#### I. WHAT IS MEANT BY "IDIOMATIC ENGLISH"

In all that concerns the planning of the whole composition and each paragraph, the mind is dominant. In the structure of sentences and in the choice of words, however, the mind can work only in ways permitted by idiom and by usage. In idiom there is little or no reason; it has evolved in varied ways, often unknown to us, and is simply a fact which must be accepted. Thus the standard idiom when comparing two things with the word "different" is: this is different *from* that. In the United States there is a marked tendency to say "different *than*"; in England, on the other hand, the habit of saying "different *to*" is so strong that it appears in many books of contemporary authors. Any one of these expressions would be acceptable if it were standard usage; any one is logically as good as any other; but "different *from*" alone is correct.<sup>1</sup> Often the only comment the teacher can make on an expression is to write "unidiomatic" on the margin. He cannot explain why the expression is unidiomatic and can only say that it is not the way in which the words concerned are used in

<sup>1</sup> A few of the most common mistakes in idiom are mentioned in chapter vii, "Words," pp. 116 ff.

our language. Perhaps an illustration will make clear what is meant by the words "idiomatic" and "unidiomatic." In shop windows in Europe one frequently sees signs indicating that foreign languages are used within. The different phrases used show how the same idea is idiomatically expressed in various languages:

English spoken

*Man spricht Deutsch* (literally, "One speaks German")

*On parle Français* (literally, "One speaks French")

*Se habla español* (literally, "Spanish speaks itself")

A story is told that a Frenchman entered a London shop which displayed the third sign and inquired rather brusquely, "Who speaks French here?" The person addressed replied, "Je, Monsieur." The story is supposed to be humorous because no one who spoke good French would use "je" in such a case, for the proper word is "moi." Both words, however, mean "I." The point of the story lies in the fact that "je" is unidiomatic and that the speaker by choosing it showed his lack of mastery of the language which he was affirming he could use.

On this matter of idiom, nothing will be found in grammars designed for persons of native birth because only persons of foreign birth are greatly troubled by it and because it is not susceptible to the formation of general rules. Even native English speakers, however, err occasionally in idiom. In such cases it is the teacher's function to point out the fault and to indicate the idiomatic form, and the student's to fix the latter in mind.

## II. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RULES AND "GOOD USAGE"

Although that aspect of "good usage" known as idiom cannot be codified, there are other habits and customs followed by educated speakers and writers which can be expressed in the form of rules. These are discussed fully in grammars and in elementary books on composition. Here it is necessary for the purpose of review to note only those grammatical and rhetorical errors which are frequently found in the writing of college students. For convenience they are classified under violations of sentence unity, coherence, and emphasis.

### III. UNITY (U)<sup>1</sup>

Unity requires that a sentence contain everything that is necessary to make it a grammatical and rhetorical unit—and nothing more.

1. To constitute a sentence, a group of words must contain one main clause, i.e., a subject and a finite verb not introduced by a subordinate conjunction.

Wrong: The evidence of the plaintiff had to be translated by the defendant's witness. For the reason that neither the plaintiff, the plaintiff's witness, nor the defendant for that matter, could speak English.

(The verb *could speak* and its three subjects are introduced by the subordinating word *that*; consequently, *For the reason . . . English* is not a sentence.)

<sup>1</sup> The letters in parentheses throughout the rest of this chapter will be used by the instructor in correcting papers; they will always be accompanied by a number. For example, *U4* on the margin of a returned theme means that the student should consult rule 4 under "Unity." See the tabulated summary on the inside of the back cover of this book.

Right: The evidence of the plaintiff had to be translated by the defendant's witness. The reason was that neither the plaintiff, the plaintiff's witness, etc.

Wrong: For days we were shut within the house. The weather being so cloudy and rainy that we could not see beyond the fence either road or passers-by.

(Being is not a finite verb; the verb *could see* with its subject, *we* is introduced by the subordinate conjunction *that*; consequently, *The weather being . . . passers-by* is not a sentence.)

2. A sentence should convey one essential idea. If it contains co-ordinate clauses, they should state ideas of equal rank and should be so combined as to bring out one dominant concept.

Wrong: Browning's parents were Presbyterians and early in life the poet was left a half-orphan by the death of his father.

(Inasmuch as Browning must have been influenced in his childhood both by the religion of his parents and the premature death of one of them, the two clauses of the sentence are not wholly unconnected in idea. But as the sentence now stands, the two concepts are not combined in such a way as to bring out one main idea.)

Right: Browning, the child of Presbyterian parents, was early in life left a half-orphan by the death of his father.

Wrong: Only a genius can write a description which will include all essential ideas and which will still not be tedious reading, and all men are not geniuses in that way.

(In this sentence the first main clause is a specific statement; the second, a generalized truth. These co-ordinate clauses, then, do not convey ideas of equal rank.)

Right: Only a genius can write a description which will include all essential ideas and which will still not be tedious reading. It is obvious, moreover, that few men have that kind of genius.

Right: Few men have that kind of genius which will enable them to write a description so that it will include all essential details and still not be tedious reading.



3. If there are two or more main clauses in a sentence, they must be connected by co-ordinate conjunctions; or semicolons must be used between them.

Wrong: The Annamese are not lazy, on the contrary, although they have some of the natural indolence of the tropics, they are hard workers.

Right: The Annamese are not lazy; on the contrary, although they, etc.

N.B.: In a progressive series of clauses expressing stages in action or closely related parts of one idea, commas may stand between each two clauses and *and*, *but*, or (*nor*) between the last two.

Right: The baggage was not light, our shoes were not meant for racing, nor was Lucy's two hundred pounds of weight conducive to speed.

4. The co-ordinate conjunctions are *and*, *but*, or (*nor*), *for*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*. Words like *so*, *accordingly*, *hence*, *therefore*, *furthermore*, *however*, are merely adverbs; they show relation in thought but do not have the binding force of conjunctions. Hence, if used between clauses, they must be preceded by semicolons.

Wrong: I'll be home all afternoon, so come up when you get ready.

Improved: I'll be home all afternoon; so come up when you get ready.<sup>1</sup>

Right: As I'll be home all afternoon, come up when you get ready.

Unity also requires that a sentence be so molded that its form completely harmonizes with its content.

5. Three or more clauses strung together with *and*, *but*, or any other co-ordinating conjunction after each produce so loose an effect that the sentence seems to have no unity. Moreover, it recalls the manner in which

<sup>1</sup> Compare No. 7 under "Unity," page 66.



a child converses, and hence is not in keeping with good prose style.

Poor: I received the books yesterday and I am very much pleased with them, but you sent me one too many, but I find that I may need it; so I shall keep it as well as the other volumes.

Right: The books which yesterday I was pleased to receive from you numbered one too many; yet, since I find that I may need the extra book, I shall keep it as well as the other volumes.

6. In a complex sentence one should not pile up subordinate clause upon subordinate clause<sup>1</sup> because such a procedure obscures the main idea of the sentence.

Wrong: After we had eaten our luncheon we again entered the college grounds seeking the rear of Nassau Hall, which was erected about the middle of the eighteenth century, in which Congress sat when driven out from Philadelphia in 1783, and which was used for barracks for both the British and American troops during the Revolution, because we wanted to see a cannon captured and left in the vicinity by Washington after the battle of Princeton.

Right: After luncheon we again entered the college grounds, seeking at the rear of Nassau Hall a cannon which was captured and left in the vicinity by Washington after the battle of Princeton. Nassau Hall, erected in the middle of the eighteenth century, is in itself a historical monument, for both British and American troops during the Revolutionary War used it as barracks, and Congress met there when driven from Philadelphia in 1783.

7. The structure of a sentence must present ideas in their true relation to each other. Many a hasty writer, having in mind two or three actions closely related in time, strings together a series of co-ordinate clauses to state the events, although the true logic of their relation-

<sup>1</sup> A subordinate clause is one introduced by a relative, such as *who*, *which*, *that*, or a subordinating conjunction, such as *although*, *because*, *since*, *while*, *in order that*, *so that*.

ship requires that one or more of them should be subordinated.

Poor: The wood was green; so it wouldn't burn.

(The ideas in this sentence are not co-ordinate; rather, the first fact is the cause or explanation of the second. Consequently the first clause ought to be not co-ordinate with the second clause, but subordinate to it.)

Right: Because the wood was green, it wouldn't burn.

8. One should make sure, moreover, that the principal clause of the sentence contains the main idea.

Wrong: It was a dark, grey day when our three canoes pulled away from the pier that was crowded with our fellow-campers.

(In this sentence the main idea is in the subordinate clause, *when our three canoes pulled away from the pier*.)

Right: On a dark, grey day, our three canoes pulled away from the pier that was crowded with our fellow-campers.

Wrong: The flour in barrels is now ready for the bakery, where it is made into bread by great machines.

Right: After the flour in barrels arrives at the bakery, it is made into bread by great machines.

*Exercise:* Correct the faults in the following sentences:

1. There grew up in Burgundy a noble maiden, in no land was a fairer.

2. Many unpublished records have been examined and prove the baselessness of the scandalous reports about him.

3. He has the knack of presenting historical facts in a palatable form and we can warmly recommend this book.

4. *Franchester* is also described as a genuine "thriller" from real life and it is doubtful if any Wild West novel could show such a bizarre type of humanity as "cold-eyed" Doc Holliday.

5. This visitor—*The Garden of Eden*—that is dashing in and right out again of the United Artists' Theater to make place for *The King of Kings* is a pleasing one. A light and whimsical comedy drama, boasting unexpected and delightful comedy quirks and turns.

6. I have never been able to boast of robust health, or of more than a living income, and have had much sickness to contend with, but I think these mothers who are compelled to face this situation

can come out on top if they cultivate a happy frame of mind, and during their working hours throw off the worries that attack them.

7. He said he felt a little hot so he cooled himself off with a vanilla ice-cream soda, a chocolate sundae, and a strawberry ice-cream cone.

8. Soon after the mayor's return in September, the council will start its session, when without delay, he can have the new cabinet members approved by the aldermen.

9. Out of the money that is pooled he draws lunch money, car fare, and clothes expenses. In fact, everything he needs.

10. Only in such instances where the streets are impassable will any attempt be made to make repairs which will be of nature just to make them passable, so that they can be negotiated with some degree of safety.

#### IV. COHERENCE

Coherence requires that a sentence be so worded and arranged that a reader can correctly construe each element of the sentence and can easily understand the grammatical and rhetorical function of each word, phrase, and clause, as well as the relationship between them.

##### MODIFIERS (M)

1. A participle (a verbal form in *ing*, used as an adjective) must modify a noun. If it begins a sentence, it should modify the subject of the first main clause in the sentence.

Wrong: Looking about him, it was clear that the room was empty.  
 Right: Looking about him, John realized that the room was empty.

Wrong: Believing as you do, I cannot continue to live with you or receive anything from you.

Improved: I cannot continue to live with you, believing as you do, or receive anything from you.

Right: Because you believe as you do, I cannot continue to live with you or receive anything from you.

2. Similarly a phrase containing a gerund (a verbal form in *-ing*, used as a noun) must modify a noun.

Wrong: On looking about him, it was clear that the room was empty.

Right: On looking about him, John realized that the room was empty.

Wrong: By refining what is left, resin is made.

Right: By refining what is left, the machine makes resin.

N.B.: A gerund must be treated as a noun, i.e., the nouns or pronouns which modify it must be in the possessive case.

Wrong: I have my doubts about it being here.

Right: I have my doubts about its being here.

Wrong: For a woman of forty to talk about other people being middle-aged is more than a trifle dangerous.

Improved: For a woman of forty to talk about other people's being middle-aged is more than a trifle dangerous.

Right: For a woman of forty to talk about other people as middle-aged is more than a trifle dangerous.

3. Likewise, an infinitive phrase used as an adjective must modify a noun.

Wrong: To understand how it all happened let me explain the mode of taking divisions in the House of Commons.

Right: To understand how it all happened, one must know the mode of taking divisions in the House of Commons.

Wrong: In order to remove the lime the skins are placed in a great vat of water and bran.

Right: In order to remove the lime, the workmen place the skins in a great vat of water and bran.

4. In the same way a phrase introduced by *due to*, *caused by*, *owing to*, must modify a noun, not the idea expressed by a clause. When it begins a sentence, it should modify the subject of the first main clause of the sentence.

Wrong: Due to his exertion in "gym," he is very tired.

Improved: His tiredness, owing to his exertion in "gym," is excessive.

Right: Because of his exertion in "gym," he is very tired.

5. When a writer begins a sentence with an adjective phrase or an incomplete clause, he should make sure that it modifies the subject of the main clause that follows.

Wrong: When a small boy, my parents worried over my slowness of thought and speech.

Right: When a small boy, I was a source of worry to my parents because of my slowness of thought and speech.

Right: When I was a small boy, my parents worried over my slowness of thought and speech.

6. To avoid ambiguity, words, phrases, and clauses should be placed close to the word they modify. *Only*, *alone*, *nearly*, *almost*, *even*, should either immediately precede or immediately follow the word they limit. For example, "I know *only* the facts" means something quite different from "*Only* I know the facts."

Poor: Just then the chief of police ordered the crowd to move on in his deep bass tones.

Right: Just then in his deep bass tones the chief of police ordered the crowd to move on.

Poor: He could almost run a mile without stopping.

Right: He could run almost a mile without stopping.

*Exercise:* Correct the faults in the following sentences:

1. As a delicate ailing boy, life presented few attractions.
2. A large proportion of them at present are only working four days a week.
3. By taking periodic daily averages, in unfolding the results of several years' investigations, for a number of solar rotations, certain general day-to-day relations can be found.
4. Judging by past events and human nature generally, it is probable that it would not be long until new divisions would appear in the ranks.

5. This has been accomplished principally by using smaller diameter wheels.

6. Coming in past the lighthouse, the shoals on the right looked very dangerous.

7. He passed a week in bed, due to a strained tendon in his back.

8. If it weren't for John looking after his condition, he would be much worse.

## VERBS (v)

A verb must agree in person and number with its subject.

1. A phrase intervening between the subject and the verb does not change the number of the subject.

Wrong: The city, by command of the senate, was burned, but the lives of all but the Roman deserter was spared.

Right: The city, by command of the senate, was burned, but the lives of all but the Roman deserter were spared.

Wrong: Every morning at six sharp, John with his companions arrive at the mill.

Right: Every morning at six sharp, John with his companions arrives at the mill.

2. If the two nouns of a compound subject connected by *either . . . or*, or *neither . . . nor*, are singular, the verb is singular.

Wrong: I knew that neither my father nor my mother were quite right.

Right: I knew that neither my father nor my mother was quite right.

3. The proper use of *shall (should)*, *will (would)*, is a very complicated matter. Usually textbooks are content with the following statements: (a) *Shall (should)* with the first person, and *will (would)* with the second or third person, denote simple futurity. (b) *Will*



(*would*) with the first person, and *shall* (*should*) with the second or third person, denote obligation, determination, or a promise. (*c*) In a question it is correct to use the form expected in the answer.

Right: (*a*) I should like to be remembered to him. (*c*) Should you, now? (*a*) Indeed, I should.

Right: (*b*) Thou shalt not steal.

Right: (*b*) I will never marry a man who has no chin.

Right: (*b*) I will do that for you tomorrow (i.e., I promise to do that for you tomorrow.)

Right: (*a*) With a few more lessons I shall be able to drive the car.

With a few more lessons he will be able to drive the car.

With a few more lessons you will be able to drive the car.

With a few more lessons we shall be able to drive the car.

N.B.: In studying the preceding rule and sentences, the students should particularly fix in mind (*a*) and the sentences illustrating it; i.e., one must use *shall* with *I* or *we* to express simple futurity.

To use tenses correctly, a student must keep in mind certain rules.

4. The use of the perfect tense (*have gone, have seen*) indicates past *indefinite* action, which could have taken place any time in the past up to the very present. One uses the past tense (*went, saw*), on the other hand, to denote action which occurred at some *definite* time in the past. To use the past tense correctly, a writer must indicate the exact moment in the past when the action took place, either by a time-word or time-phrase (e.g., *yesterday, ten years ago, once upon a time*) or by the preceding facts in his discourse.

Wrong: I never knew anyone to like sugar as well as my brother did.

Right: Until I married, I never knew anyone to like sugar as well as my brother did.



Right: I have never known anyone to like sugar as well as my brother did.

N.B.: The perfect tense of *get* is not *have gotten*, but *have got*: the perfect tense of *prove* is not *have proven*, but *have proved*.

5. If in narrating a past event, one wishes to tell of an action earlier than the event, one uses the pluperfect tense (i.e., *had gone*, *had seen*) to make the relation in time clear to the reader.

Wrong: After three hundred years passed away, men found again Petra, "the rose-red city, half as old as time."

Right: After three hundred years had passed away, men found again Petra, "the rose-red city, half as old as time."

6. It is incorrect to use the perfect infinitive for the present infinitive. The present infinitive expresses action occurring simultaneously with that of the main verb, whether the latter indicates present or past time.

Right: In December I plan to go to Louisville.

Wrong: In December I planned to have gone to Louisville.

Right: In December I planned to go to Louisville.

7. Unless there is some change in the actual time involved, it is incorrect within the sentence, the paragraph, or the theme as a whole to shift from the present tense to the past or from the past to the present.

Wrong: Motley paintings, representing religious matters, such as "Purgatory," "Hell," "The Last Judgment," were hanging on the walls. At the back of the room fastened in a splendid and elegant framework in the Renaissance style is a glass case which contains the mummies of two old women.

Right: Motley paintings, representing religious matters, such as "Purgatory," "Hell," "The Last Judgment," were hanging on the walls. At the back of the room, fastened in a splendid and elegant framework in the Renaissance style, was a glass case which contained the mummies of two old women.

8. A writer who follows the best usage does not place an adverb between *to* and the verb part of the infinitive.

Poor: The time for the people to successfully assert their rights had not yet come.

Right: The time for the people successfully to assert their rights had not yet come.

*Exercise:* Correct the faults in the following sentences:

1. I'm sorry I missed you, for I should have liked to have seen you.

2. We always will be met with the problem of expansion.

3. In Persia feasts are always celebrated with frenzy; for four nights wails arose from the mosques; for four days the streets were crowded with processions.

4. We made up our minds to actually find out what truth lay behind the story.

5. Leonard, together with several of his friends, go every Sunday to free concerts.

6. From 1918 to the present time, no other school opened its doors to the negro.

7. Chicago might be the dirty, ill-kempt city it always was; it could have left its broad planning to the officials of the city.

8. My mother taught me lessons of thrift and careful management; now I had to apply them.

#### PRONOUNS (P)

A pronoun, whether personal (*he, she, it*), relative (*who, which*), or demonstrative (*this, that*), must refer to a preceding noun. (This rule does not apply to the demonstrative used as an *adjective*; see No. 6 under this section.)

1. It is incorrect to use a pronoun which lacks an antecedent.

Wrong: He is so good an organist that he can handle one admirably the first time he plays on it.

Right: He is so good an organist that he can handle an organ admirably the first time he plays on one.

2. A pronoun must refer to a definite noun as its antecedent. It cannot have as antecedent the idea expressed by a clause or a sentence.

Wrong: He then advocated church reform which caused opponents to rise and accuse him of heresy.

Right: He then advocated church reform, an action which caused opponents to rise and accuse him of heresy.

Wrong: A story to be successful should not begin better than it ends. Some of Thackeray's works are examples of this.

Right: A story to be successful should not begin better than it ends. Some of Thackeray's works are examples of the truth of this principle.

3. The antecedent of a pronoun must be definite and not ambiguous.

a) If the antecedent of a pronoun is at all ambiguous, the writer should substitute, for the pronoun, a noun or should use the words *the former* or *the latter*. In some cases of ambiguity it may be necessary to change part of the sentence into direct discourse.

Wrong: A few days ago I saw the sparrows destroy the lettuce. One farmer saved his vegetables by shooting them or driving them off.

Right: A few days ago I saw the sparrows destroy the lettuce. One farmer saved his vegetables by shooting the birds or driving them off.

Wrong: David prepared the defense of his mother against the charges brought by Mrs. Starkey while she used money freely to secure the necessary witnesses.

(The antecedent of *she* may be either *mother* or *Mrs. Starkey*.)

Right: David prepared the defense of his mother against the charges brought by Mrs. Starkey while the latter used money freely to secure the necessary witnesses.

Wrong: Mr. Messersmith told my brother that he was not the man for the job.

Right: Mr. Messersmith said to my brother, "You are not the man for the job."

b) A personal pronoun refers to the subject of the preceding main clause, unless the gender or number of some other noun makes the latter indubitably the antecedent.

Poor: Operating on these cliffs, the sea-waves break down the strata; at every stroke they give way and fall into the sea.

(The writer desires the antecedent of *they* to be *strata*, but actually it is *sea-waves*.)

Right: Operating on these cliffs, the sea-waves break down the strata; at every stroke the latter give way and fall into the sea.

Right: When she returned she found her children playing in the yard; they were playing house, quite unaware of the catastrophe which threatened them.

c) To avoid ambiguity, a relative pronoun should be placed as close as possible to its antecedent.

Poor: Dr. A. F. Miller was elected yesterday to the new chair of politics in the university which has just been established.

Right: Yesterday at the university Dr. A. F. Miller was elected to the new chair of politics which has just been established.

4. A shift in the antecedent of a pronoun gives rise to ambiguity.

Poor: The Indians feared the Americans and did not annoy their settlements; so to the Mexicans they appeared leagued together.

(*Their* refers to *Americans*; *they* to *Indians* and *Americans*. These pronouns should refer to the same antecedent.)

Right: The Indians feared the Americans and did not annoy their settlements; so to the Mexicans the two peoples seemed leagued together.

Poor: There is water vapor in the air. Even though it cannot be seen it can be proved that it rises almost continually from the earth's surface.

(Grammatically there is nothing wrong with this sentence; but the use of *it* twice as a personal pronoun [*it cannot be seen; it rises*] and once as an impersonal pronoun, a mere introductory word, is confusing to the reader.)

Right: There is water vapor in the air. Even though it cannot be seen, one can prove that it rises almost continually from the earth's surface.

5. A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, number, and gender.

Wrong: Spenser is one of the poets who belongs to the splendid age of Elizabeth.

Right: Spenser is one of the poets who belong to the splendid age of Elizabeth.

Wrong: When ninety-five per cent of the officers of the army report in favor of the canteen, why should a class condemn them without a thorough investigation of their work?

Right: When ninety-five per cent of the officers of the army report in favor of the canteen, why should a class condemn it without a thorough investigation of its work?

6. Either a demonstrative adjective must refer to a previous idea or the noun which it modifies must be followed by a relative clause. The "previous idea" may be expressed by a noun, a clause, or a phrase; but *it must be expressed, not implied*.

Wrong: I was overcome by that tired feeling.

Right: I was overcome by that tired feeling that often assails me at the end of a day.

Wrong: The poster, a picture attractively designed and colored, became the fad, but like everything else taken in that spirit soon died a natural death.

(In this sentence there is no "previous idea" expressed by a noun, a clause, or a phrase, to which *in that spirit* can refer.)

Improved: The poster, a picture attractively designed and colored, was at first greeted by the public as a great novelty, but, like everything else taken in that spirit, soon died a natural death.

(In this sentence *in that spirit* refers to the manner in which the public always greets a novelty.)

7. A pronoun's grammatical function within the sentence determines its case.

a) A pronoun which is the subject of a finite verb must be in the nominative case.

Wrong: The detectives could not locate the strange man whom she said shot her husband.

(*She said* is a parenthetical clause introduced by *as*, understood; *whom* is the subject of *shot* and must be in the nominative case.)

Right: The detectives could not locate the strange man who, she said, shot her husband.

Wrong: Whom do you think will be the next president?

Right: Who do you think will be the next president?

(The object of *think* is the clause *who will be the next president*; the subject of the clause is *who*.)

b) A pronoun which is the subject of an infinitive must be in the objective case.

Wrong: Who should you like to be the next president?

Right: Whom should you like to be the next president?

c) A pronoun which is the object of a preposition must be in the objective case.

Wrong: Who are you looking for?

Right: Whom are you looking for?

Wrong: Between Anne and I, the cake disappeared.

Right: Between Anne and me, the cake disappeared.

Certain common mistakes in regard to the number, gender, and usage of certain pronouns should be avoided.



8. The distributives *each*, *every* (*everyone*, *everybody*, *everything*), *any* (*anyone*, etc.), *no* (*no one*, etc.), *either*, *neither*, are singular. When any of these distributives is the subject of the sentence or modifies the subject, the verb which follows should be singular in number. A pronoun which has as its antecedent a distributive or a noun modified by a distributive must be singular in number.

Wrong: Though both boys ran a temperature for two days, neither of them were seriously ill.

Right: Though both boys ran a temperature for two days, neither of them was seriously ill.

Wrong: If any student wants to know the truth about the campus elections, let them meet me in my room this evening.

Right: If any student wants to know the truth about the campus elections, let him meet me in my room this evening.

### 9. *He* is the pronoun of common gender.

Wrong: On rainy days every pupil takes off his or her overshoes and places them in a row in the outer hall.

Right: On rainy days every pupil takes off his overshoes and places them in a row in the outer hall.

Wrong: A teacher will find that even dull pupils will learn if she presents her material by means of the project method.

(A teacher is not necessarily a woman; consequently one should use *he*, *him*, pronouns of common gender.)

Right: A teacher will find that even dull pupils will learn if he presents his material by means of the project method.

10. It is incorrect to use *he*, *his*, *him* to refer to *one*; one simply repeats *one*.

Wrong: If today one rode a tandem bicycle, he would be looked upon by the passers-by as a curiosity.

Right: If today one rode a tandem bicycle, one would be looked upon by the passers-by as a curiosity.



11. *You* and *we*, as well as *one*, are often used impersonally for "people in general." In adopting one of these forms, however, a writer must not shift within a paragraph from a form such as *you*, which is second person, to a form such as *one*, which is third. He should keep to the same impersonal pronoun throughout the paragraph.

Wrong: If you will examine London documents of the fourteenth century, you will revise your notions about medieval London. One will find definite ordinances which will show that Chaucer's contemporaries knew the value of sanitation and enjoyed the luxury of plumbing and sewers.

Right: If you will examine London documents of the fourteenth century, you will revise your notions about medieval London. You will find, etc.

Right: If one will examine London documents of the fourteenth century, one will, etc. One will find, etc.

Right: If one will examine London documents of the fourteenth century, one will, etc. A student will find, etc.

12. *Myself* is a reflexive or intensive pronoun; it is incorrect to use it unless within the sentence there is an *I* or *me* to which it can refer.

Wrong: Don't you remember that you, mother, and myself saw the divine Sarah in *L' Aiglon*?

Right: Don't you remember that you, mother, and I saw the divine Sarah in *L' Aiglon*?

Right: Even I, myself, realize what a fool I have been.  
(In this sentence *myself* is an intensive pronoun.)

Right: I give myself some of the credit for his success.  
(In this sentence *myself* is a reflexive pronoun.)

13. In America it is not correct to use *which* as an adjective except with interrogative force.

Right: Do you know which book you want?

Wrong: He asked three hundred dollars for the mare which horse, he said, would have been worth more if she had had proper care when a colt.

Right: He asked three hundred dollars for the mare, which, he said, would be worth more, etc.

Wrong: There was a prerequisite for Physics 232 which fact prevented me from taking the course.

Improved: There was a prerequisite for Physics 232, a fact which prevented me from taking the course.

Right: Because there was a prerequisite for Physics 232, I could not take the course.

*And which* construction. (See No. 8 under "Construction," page 85.)

*Exercise:* Correct the faults in the following sentences:

1. While on tour the "Rube" startled the baseball world by marrying his vaudeville partner; which was natural enough, but as "Rube" was a left-handed pitcher it caused considerable hilarity everywhere.

2. When the date matures it is soft and moist, having about the same consistency as the plum. Then, gradually, the intense heat of the oriental sun literally bakes their sweetness into them; they become firm, and almost crystallize in their own sugar.

3. My name was presented to that political party by the people of California; it was a mark of their confidence and esteem.

4. Their parents were killed during the civil wars and the revolution, or they were separated from them.

5. He pointed out that it was the practice of the government to stand strongly behind its men, which would indicate that any request from New Jersey state authorities for the surrender of the guard would meet with refusal.

6. Hiding in a narrow, back room they found the man whom they asserted had started the conflagration.

7. Everyone familiar with the facts will grant the truth of my first premise, but they may not agree so readily to my second.

8. Every teacher knows that she cannot expect unanimous satisfaction with any one plan.

9. The experiment was carried on by two classmates and myself.

10. After several trials we decided to use a percentage of zinc chloride, which method proved a complete success.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF THE SENTENCE (c)

A writer violates coherence if he unnecessarily shifts his point of view within the sentence.

1. It is incorrect to join in one sentence interrogative and imperative clauses, declarative and imperative clauses, or declarative and interrogative clauses.

Wrong: Old waists can be cleaned with alcohol, the sleeves cut smaller and with the pieces left make new collars and cuffs.

(Here *make* is an imperative.)

Improved: Old waists can be cleaned with alcohol, the sleeves cut smaller, and with the pieces left new collars and cuffs can be made.

Right: A person can clean old waists with alcohol, cut the sleeves smaller, and with the pieces left make new collars and cuffs.

2. A writer should avoid shifting from the active to the passive voice within the sentence.<sup>1</sup>

Poor: He had about him such an air of contentment coupled with happiness that my attention was attracted and held.

Right: He had about him such an air of contentment coupled with happiness that he attracted and held my attention.

3. Unless there is a contrast involved, it is best not to shift the subject within the sentence. This rule takes precedence over the preceding one.

Poor: We opened the door, and as we walked up the stairs, the first sight that met our eyes was a large sign with the word "Welcome."

Right: We opened the door, and as we walked up the stairs, we immediately saw a large sign with the word "Welcome."

<sup>1</sup> Compare No. 2 under "Emphasis," page 88.

Poor: As children are in reality young savages, their parents must train them to live in a civilized social fashion.

Right: As children are in reality young savages, they must be trained by their parents to live in a civilized social fashion.

4. In presenting antithetical or similar ideas, a writer often uses parallel sentence structure.

a) Parallel ideas in a sentence must be expressed by similar parts of speech in similar grammatical structure.

Wrong: The most common defects of speech are stammering or stuttering, lisp<sup>ing</sup>, and tongue-tied.

(*Stammering*, *stuttering*, *lisp<sup>ing</sup>* are verbal nouns; *tongue-tied* is an adjective.)

Right: The most common defects of speech are stammering or stuttering, lisp<sup>ing</sup>, and tongue-tiedness.

Wrong: The greatest difficulty was presented by the Desplaines River usually a small prairie stream but at the time of the freshet, it becomes a torrent.

(*Stream* is a noun; *it becomes a torrent*, a clause.)

Right: The greatest difficulty was presented by the Desplaines River, usually a small prairie stream, but at the time of the freshet, a formidable torrent.

b) Placing correlatives, such as *not only . . . but also*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, *immediately* before antithetical or similar expressions secures clearness in the sentence. The groups of words which follow these expressions must be, moreover, grammatically equivalent; e.g., if there is a verb in one group of words introduced by *neither*, there must be a verb in the corresponding group of words introduced by *nor*.

Wrong: Homer was not only the maker of a nation but also of a language and a religion.

Improved: Homer was not only the maker of a nation but also the maker of a language and a religion.

Right: Homer was the maker not only of a nation but also of a language and a religion.

Wrong: Mrs. Gray had won not only college honors in her youth, but also she had been one of the prettiest girls in the college.  
(The group of words following *but also* contains a verb, whereas the group of words following *not only* does not.)

Right: Not only had Mrs. Gray won college honors in her youth, but also she had been one of the prettiest girls in college.

5. In using *but that*, a writer should be careful that the resulting sentence does not contradict what he actually wishes to say.

Wrong: He didn't mean that she should pay his way but that she should give him a chance to earn it.

(*He didn't mean . . . that she should give him a chance to earn his way* quite contradicts what the writer actually wishes to say.)

Right: He meant not that she should pay his way but that she should give him a chance to earn it.

N.B.: In the sentence, *I have no doubt but that he will come* the *but* is unnecessary; *I have no doubt that he will come* says the same thing in fewer words.

6. In using *nor*, a writer sometimes makes a similar mistake, with the result that the expression becomes a double negative.

Wrong: The hall didn't have furniture of any kind, nor any pictures.  
(The verb *didn't have* negates the whole clause; consequently the use of *nor* results in a double negative.)

Right: The hall didn't have furniture of any kind *or* any pictures.

Right: The hall had no furniture of any kind *nor* any pictures.

Right: The hall had *neither* furniture of any kind *nor* any pictures.

Right: The hall didn't have *either* furniture of any kind *or* any pictures.

N.B.: The last two sentences illustrate the correlatives which properly go together: *neither . . . nor, either . . . or*. It is incorrect to couple *either* with *nor*.

7. In a comparison an omission of too many words results in ambiguity or the association of incomparable things.

Ambiguous: I liked that man very much—almost as much as his little girl.

Clear: I liked that man very much—almost as much as his little girl likes him.

Clear: I liked that man very much—almost as much as I like his little girl.

Wrong: The constant exertion of this one woman has done more to give our sex equal rights with men than any other person interested in feminism.

(One cannot compare *exertion* with *a person*.)

Right: The constant exertion of this one woman has done more to give our sex equal rights with men than that of any other person interested in feminism.

8. When a writer uses *and which* or *and who*, he should make sure that there is a preceding *which* or *who* clause.

Wrong: According to Douglas Smith, the *Herald's* foreign correspondent, and whose dispatches hitherto have invariably been accurate, the forces of Chang Tso Lin have suffered a serious defeat.

Right: According to Douglas Smith, the *Herald's* foreign correspondent, whose dispatches hitherto, etc.

Wrong: The \$100,000 stolen by Cashier John B. Ketting and which the defaulting official brought to Monterey and buried has been found by a sheep-herder.

Improved: The \$100,000 which was stolen by Cashier John B. Ketting and which was brought to Monterey and buried by the defaulting official has been found by a sheep-herder.

Right: The \$100,000 which Cashier John B. Ketting stole, brought to Monterey, and buried has been found by a sheep-herder.



Other common faults in sentence structure should be avoided.

9. A clause introduced by *because* is equivalent to an adverb and consequently cannot be the subject, object, or attribute of a verb.

Wrong: The reason I am not going is because I cannot afford to.  
 Right: The reason I am not going is that I cannot afford to.

10. Although a participle absolute construction is correct grammatically, it should be avoided because from its very nature one cannot tell how it is connected in thought with the main idea of the sentence.

Ambiguous: But the leadership of the Fronde falling to the nobility the whole movement soon degenerated into a struggle between local authority as represented in the nobles and central authority as represented in the crown.

(Does the reader mean: *when* the leadership fell, etc., *because* the leadership, etc., or *although* the leadership, etc.? The absolute participle construction does not make clear the relation between the subordinate idea and the main idea of the sentence; it should, in consequence, be replaced by a *when, because, or although* clause.)

*Exercise:* Correct the following sentences:

1. Nurse Cavell had no thought of fame or self, but can you doubt what her feelings would have been if she had thought that such a use was to be made of her sacrifice?

2. "The only way people in this locality can obtain any permanent relief where this type of pavement is concerned," the statement said, "is either to have a new hard-type pavement laid or, where sufficient material can be salvaged in the macadam base, it can be resurfaced with either asphalt or asphaltic-concrete."

3. The question of the presidential succession will not be taken up at the special session of Congress, which convenes tomorrow, but at the regular session, which convenes September first.

4. Just the aroma of bacon cooked in the open air has an irresistible lure and a bewitching effect upon the desire to eat, and it



really doesn't make much difference how the bacon is cooked, nor how it is served.

5. The chief beneficiary of the will of James Smith, filed for probate today and which disposes of an estate of \$1,000,000 is his mother.

6. The spinners, therefore, felt that they should not be called on to discharge workmen who had given satisfaction merely because of a quarrel to which they were not parties.

7. After facing for fifteen years what she has to face, I feel that she is neither fair to herself nor her child.

8. There is no appetite so jaded that a bacon bat cannot set it on edge again, whether the feast be at the end of a tramp far into the woods or just a little jaunt to the lake and back again after the plunge.

9. That was when Cooper—the boat being small and the tiger occupying most of it—got on top of the cage and went peacefully to sleep himself.

10. The famous large monkey was tame and easily managed, though it happened that the picture-men found the small monkeys hard to photograph, because they were frightened by the noise of the camera and the bright sunlight made them sleepy.

#### V. EMPHASIS (E)

Emphasis requires that the material in a sentence be so massed and arranged that the main idea stands out effectively.

I. It is to be remembered that the end of a sentence is the place of emphasis.

a) Hence if phrases like "to some extent" and "in my opinion" come there, the result is a flat and ineffective sentence.

Poor: Such a proceeding would be treason to God, to country, and even to the family in my judgment.

Right: Such a proceeding, in my judgment, would be treason to God, to country, and even to the family.

b) In short, any unimportant word, phrase, or clause tacked on to the end of a sentence results in lack of emphasis.

Poor: Something is the matter with the machinery of our government when a convicted felon can be nominated for a position of trust and responsibility before our very eyes.

Right: Something is the matter with the machinery of our government when a convicted felon can be nominated before our very eyes for a position of trust and responsibility.

Poor: The moon is a mighty goddess who protects the world from harm every night.

Right: The moon is a mighty goddess who every night protects the world from harm.

N.B.: One can often make an unemphatic sentence emphatic by re-arranging a sentence so that modifying phrases and clauses stand first and the main clause last.

Poor: On that day when I together with a fellow-student returned from that ill-timed visit to the South Side, I watched the ominous signs with sinking heart as the cable car crept along.

Right: On that day when, together with a fellow-student, I returned in a slow-moving cable car from that ill-timed visit to the South Side, I watched with a sinking heart the ominous signs.

2. Many writers overuse the passive voice. Because the passive is weak and ineffective, it should be avoided whenever the idea is not necessarily passive.

Poor: This was the hardest course ever taken by me.

Right: This was the hardest course I ever took.

N.B.: A sentence which contains an unrelated participle, gerund, or infinitive is usually one in which the verb is unnecessarily passive. (See sections 1-3 under "Modifiers," pages 68-69.)

Wrong: The hair is removed by putting the skins into a mill.

Right: The workmen remove the hair from the skins by putting them into a mill.

3. A constant use of exclamatory sentences and rhetorical questions is a weak way to secure emphasis.

These devices, moreover, are so easy that everyone can use them, and hence they have lost what little effect they once had.

Poor: Is prohibition successful? Has it not made us disrespectful of law? Does it not curtail individual liberty in a way which is not in keeping with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence? And behold, moreover, its effect upon the young people of our generation! How shameful the results are when measured by the sights one sees in night-clubs and in cabarets!

*Exercise 1:* Correct the faults in the following sentences:

1. Convicts in the so-called "honor" class must in future return from the honor farm to spend each night in their cells behind the prison walls, according to a ruling by Attorney-General Smith, it was announced yesterday.

2. What visions are these, that suddenly fill the region! What royal faces of monarchs, proud with power, or pallid with anguish! What sweet, imperial women, gleeful with happy youth and love, or wide-eyed and rigid in tearless woe! What warriors, with serpent diadems, defiant of death and hell! The mournful eyes of Hamlet; the wild countenance of Lear; Ariel with his band and Prospero with his wand! Here is no death! All these and more are immortal shapes; and he that made them so, though his mortal part be but a handful of dust in yonder crypt, is a glorious angel beyond the stars!

3. All day we trudged doggedly ahead in the wastes: not a sound could be heard in the desert, not a thing but drifting sand could be seen; the heat could be felt in hot sheets rebounding from the dazzling ground.

4. What remains of his work at Padua would lead us to believe that for once he had departed there from his tradition and had permitted himself just for a moment to paint in a new manner, in the strong and beautiful figure of the Madonna, with a man and a woman in the folds of her garment, and kneeling at her feet the patron who commissioned the work.

*Exercise 2:* Indicate what is wrong with the following sentences, and rewrite them correctly.

1. The highbinders' restaurant was furnished elegantly with

mahogany furniture inlaid with pearl, the finest damask, and the most dainty china.

2. Senator Chandler intimated strongly this afternoon that Mr. Clark's appointment by the governor would be contested and that objection would be made to him resuming his seat until the matter had been investigated by the committee.

3. Longfellow was brought up in a home of culture and refinement, and he shows this in all of his writings.

4. You will admit she is talented in art, then why keep her at home to be a society butterfly when she is bubbling over with ambition?

5. His ambition often has and in the future often will get him in trouble, for he expects results too quickly and when they do not come he becomes a little bit impatient, but this does not last long with him, for he is of an optimistic nature.

6. Our race has ever been asking this question and answering their own question in a great and silent way.

7. No time was lost in boarding a train for Boston. Arriving there and changing cars, his heart began to beat a little faster as he realized that only a few miles separated him from his mother.

8. The Russians constructed a great harbor in which they found the water unsafe when the wind blew from the southeast. To overcome this defect they built a great breakwater which made the water so quiet that it froze in winter, so Russia looked for a good port again.

9. His tastes, his virtues and vices, his prejudices and enjoyments, are like his brothers in England.

10. If he has charge of the picnic, I know we will enjoy ourselves.

11. Then this machine blends the flour. This is done by mixing it.

12. Behind the network of woodbine there are comfortable chairs, which, like nearly everything else in the house, came across the water a century ago, scattered about the porch.

*Exercise 3:* Write sentences, illustrating each rule in this chapter; model the illustrations on the sentences marked *right*.

*Exercise 4:* Indicate what is wrong with the following sentences, and rewrite them.

1. So bitter was the opposition to the capture of rats that monstrous stories were invented by the Hindus of officers throwing live rats on the fires, as if to give pleasure to men tired and weary, and

knowing the danger of handling rats, doing what they need not do, even if a sense of humanity did not forbid them.

2. If on a clear moon-lit night, one stands on the top and gazes over the valley below, he feels man's insignificance in comparison to the earth. Then look upward and you will also realize how small is that very earth in comparison to the infinite universe.

3. A subway offered many points of superiority over the other plans. It would destroy but little property; it would eliminate the constant danger which pedestrians undergo when crossing surface tracks; it would increase capacity for traffic; it would be possible to run cars at much higher speed.

4. He was made a Doctor of Divinity at Wittenberg which required taking an oath to expound and defend the Scriptures.

5. These matters only were known to Hartley, the secretary and the treasurer.

6. The policy of the United States in Nicaragua is attracting the attention of all nations. It is a chance for a nation to make an alliance with Nicaragua.

7. The poem describes how in the still hours of the night he mounted his horse and started homeward and his trip home.

8. The conductor went through the train and asked each of the passengers for their tickets.

9. He alleged that Bronson, whom he supposed was an American, had written him a letter.

10. I should as soon have thought of speaking to him as to the old elm or the school pump—obstacles with which I had been familiar all my life, and yet scarcely recognized their presence.

11. The reason for him not attending class was because he was ill in bed.

12. How we fought the winds and waves, for it seemed for a little time that we could not conquer the boisterous elements.

13. The sky grew darker rapidly, so we quickened our pace. A hard thing for short-legged Tom.

14. Both his father and mother were drunkards, so what can you expect from him?

15. The cheerfulness of the wounded struck me as remarkable—men with gaping wounds smoking their pipes, and although starving, not a grumble did I hear.

16. Negotiations are now in progress between the two countries in order to come to an amicable agreement.

17. Not being a resident of Windy City, I was desirous of seeing all that my limited time would permit, so, accompanied by a friend one warm afternoon, we boarded a north-side car for a trip to the state park.

18. One who is not accustomed to walking the dark city streets at midnight would be much surprised to know how much there was going on, of one nature or another, which are detrimental to individuals as well as to society as a whole.

19. He accepted the invitation and a pleasant dinner was given to him.

20. To make the evangelization effectual two things depend largely upon the pastor.

21. We have seen that the saloon is useful in rendering certain necessary services not provided by other institutions, or if provided, they do not come within reach of a large part of the population.

22. That is a car guaranteed to do sixty miles an hour and which has been known to go as many as ninety miles.

23. I was particularly impressed with the outside iron stairways, leading from the emergency exits, and how adequately they were marked with danger lights. Also the new fireproofing which you have placed in your dressing rooms and under the stage. You have really covered everything that is conducive to the safety and comfort, and the means of ingress and egress, of your audiences.

24. These facts are known to you and who else?

25. The boat began to leave the pier when a naval officer came around and securely locked every porthole.

26. It was later shown that neither Campbell or Rogers were quite right, but that the views of both together, modified to some extent, was the correct solution.

27. These shoes are only sold in Chicago by Somners and Company.

28. I often hear my mistress and her friends talking about selling things to get money, and I shudder at the possibility of a price being set upon my head.

29. Two million dollars more will be necessary to entirely complete all the necessary works.

30. A teacher who is interested in her pupils will succeed in making them like her.

31. That same season I was chosen to manage the club dances. Upon this officer rested the success of the club.



32. Although born in America, England claims Henry James as her own.

33. I called to see Dr. McGaffert more to avoid overlooking a possible job than expecting to get one.

34. The two were spinsters about forty years of age, Anne being about two years older than June and the dominating force of the household. Moreover, Anne it was who must be spared the shocks and jars from the cruel and unfeeling world.

35. *The Life and Works of Sir John Millais* is one of the most interesting biographies that has appeared in years.

36. From early childhood I was resentful of criticism which fact has made my parents' task a difficult one.

37. In the effort to get pure water, the city built, at great expense, tunnels to intake cribs, first at a distance of one mile, and finally the length was increased to four miles.

38. The ground, after leaving camp, sloped gradually upward with only a few gentle undulations to the ridge of the kopjes.

39. On the other side was a small passage leading to the sties and on either side of this the corn-bins.

40. Then one girl decreed that no one should go to sleep until he came back, and enforced it.

41. Upon the football team depends the honor and glory of a university in the sporting world and most zealously do they train and practice, overstepping the limits of harmonious development and becoming physically veritable giants but much, it is to be regretted, to their mental and moral detriment.

42. To provide the means of sustaining life with any degree of comfort, necessity compelled him to give to the world some of our most useful inventions.

43. In case of a fire in a school building there would be very little emotion shown by the children because of the numerous fire drills which were experienced.

44. As I turned about to face Mother, I caught a glimpse of a brighter color; the deathly pallor had disappeared from her thin features surrounded by her silver white hair.

45. He didn't think that he would be able to attend school that year but that he might return the following year.

46. His personality is strong, his chief characteristics being alertness of body and mind, converses with ease and is of a nervous temperament.



47. At Lockport there is a sudden fall of forty feet and to control the flow of water while lowering it, very elaborate works have been constructed at this point.

48. "Where's Tom?" "He went to the hospital."

49. This meeting was called by the king in order that he might receive the collective answer to his very important question from the bishops at one time.

50. Ethel wore a gown trimmed with red braid which fitted her figure neatly.

51. No one knew the source of their income. The father accomplished only a small inadequate amount of farming and the daughters did only their housework and yet they had plenty of food and clothing and all the necessities of life, and their house they kept supplied and scrupulously clean, although it is suspected that in the matter of cleaning as in other ways Bessie was the active force and Lucy the directing agent.

52. I would like to see him very much.

53. Down a basement flight of stairs at 106 Custom House Place is another betting center. Here negroes congregate chiefly, the unplastered hole being dark and damp.

54. It has been said that the poor man does not get fair treatment in our courts. This is particularly true when the accuser is more influential or prosperous than the defendant.

55. He always lived in this house.

56. Although one ought not neglect reading which keeps one in touch with the affairs of the world, there is also value in reading for enjoyment.

57. If one theater can be built in Chicago during this confusion of labor troubles, we can see nothing to prevent us building another.

58. I will do just like you want me to.

59. How to get there was the problem. This difficulty was solved by borrowing the minister's horse and buggy.

60. Before I entered this school, I attended the academy at Millford.

61. I shall do my best to bring him to reason—that I promise you.

62. When the new theater opened its doors to the public yesterday, it flocked in and filled all the seats.

63. While we were in Bombay the plague was at its quiescent

period, but, notwithstanding this, there are, on an average, from ten to twenty patients in the hospital even when the mortality is lowest.

64. It would have been a cruel thing to have done to have turned a deserving man away from the door.

65. On returning to his alma mater, John could not recognize the buildings nor even the trees which he thought he remembered well.

66. While here at Boli Harbor one day, the white missionary being absent, a great Savo war-canoe, chanting their weird war-song, came sweeping round the point under fifty paddles.

67. Swept on by his entreaties to a point where concealment is no longer possible, he believes her about to yield to his love.

68. The boy in the rural schools spends much time and energy in getting his lesson from the textbook, but having got it alone, it is his to keep.

69. The engraving and halftone work is also of especial merit, it being claimed by the publisher that it is some of the best work ever put upon his presses, and to be far superior to that being put in the annuals of any of the other large western universities.

70. The explanation took some time accordingly I was quite tired by the end of the interview.

71. The choice of a good pavement is governed by six requirements. In certain situations, however, some of these are overlooked for more important special considerations, as, for example, granite blocks make an excellent pavement for a street in a large city under heavy traffic, but they would not be suitable for a boulevard.

72. The meat to be examined is brought from the yards to the room where the examination is made in large boxes each of which contains one hundred small boxes.

73. As a child he had a very imaginative mind and was very fond of dumb animals.

74. At times the whole class laugh heartily in which the dean joins.

75. When mother came home, she found Prue and myself weeping lustily.

76. In the introduction to the "Ode on Immortality" a reference is made to the happy days of childhood and the significance of them in his life.

77. The rich man of Chicago is falling into the same error that his ancestors have back to the time of Abraham.

## CHAPTER VI

### EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

#### I. ARE YOU INTERESTING?

If a student observes the rules in the preceding chapter, he will write correctly; yet a letter, an article, or an address from his pen may be so soporific and tiresome that his correspondent, his reader, or his audience may judge him a bore. Such an impression may be a true one, for we all know that some people are stupid and that little can be done to change them; on the other hand, a man who has interesting ideas and extensive knowledge may *seem* a bore because he does not know how to present his material in an interesting way. To do justice to his material, a writer must know not only how to select and organize what he wants to say but how to say it with force and charm. Now any student can secure these qualities for his writing if he will make himself the possessor of two things: a nice sense of words (a topic which will be discussed in the next chapter) and an understanding of effective sentences (the subject of this chapter).

#### II. ADAPTATION OF SENTENCE FORM TO CONTENT

The putting of a thought into a sentence is quite like giving a jewel a setting: one may enhance or obscure its value. Thus to show off the true worth of an idea,

one must develop the instinct of a connoisseur and choose among the many types of sentences that form which will best convey what one wishes to express. Simple, compound, and complex sentences are not only different mechanical means of employing clauses but also various means of expressing different kinds of ideas and their relationship to each other. That is: if an idea consists of a single concept, a writer should choose a simple sentence<sup>1</sup> as its vehicle; if an idea involves two or more main concepts, he should select a compound sentence<sup>2</sup> as the best means of presenting it; but, if an idea is complicated, consisting of a main concept and one or more secondary concepts which bear in some way upon it, he should realize that a complex sentence<sup>3</sup> is necessary.

Because of the influence of common speech, most inexperienced writers in expressing their ideas employ sentences consisting of one clause or, at the most, of two clauses connected by *and*, *but*, or *or*, to the practical exclusion of complex sentences. Even the most unobservant of us note this tendency in the conversation of those of our friends who tell a long story punctuated with frequent *and-er's*, junctions at which they gain their breath. This habit transferred from spoken to written

<sup>1</sup> A simple sentence has one main clause and no subordinate clauses.

<sup>2</sup> A compound sentence has two or more main clauses. When none of them contains subordinate clauses, the sentence is called simple-compound; when one or all of them contain subordinate clauses, the sentence is called complex-compound.

<sup>3</sup> A complex sentence has one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

English becomes more than a mannerism, for it produces an article which consists of merely simple and simple compound sentences. The effect of such a series is that of a mass of undifferentiated ideas, coming in all at once, with the consequence that the reader must either reason out their relative importance or take what he can get in mass. In the former case, he must work harder than most readers will; in the latter he may miss the idea for which the writer cares most. The advantage of the complex sentence is that it emphasizes the main idea by lowering, through subordination, the status of the incidental ones and so does away with such vagueness. If an idea consists of one main concept (or two) and several qualifying ones, the only form that can truly and logically express it is a complex sentence, and by using that form, one saves the reader the labor of ferreting out the real point of the sentence.

Yet there are times when a paragraph of simple or simple compound sentences is effective. By a succession of such sentences an imaginative writer can make his reader feel at an exciting point in a narrative expectation, suspense, anxiety. In simple narrative such episodes as the turning-point of a football game, the opening of the box which contains the unexpected gift, the dazed condition which follows upon the discovery of some tragic fact, lend themselves more effectively to simple sentences than to elaborate complex sentences. Simple sentences following swiftly upon each other make vivid to the reader the breathlessness of quick action,

the excitement attendant upon a discovery, the incoherence of mind which comes as the result of a tragic happening. On the other hand, through the use of simple sentences, one cannot impart to the reader sublimity of mood, or the religious, mental, or emotional elation which accompanies experiences such as the contemplation of the heavens through a telescope, the hearing of a great symphony, the realization of the peace and inevitability of death. The following passages, both written by Charlotte Brontë, illustrate the fact that she was quite conscious of the different effects on the reader's mind of a series of short sentences and of a long, involved sentence. The first quotation pictures two women alone in an English rectory as a mob approaches to storm a mill nearby; the next, a death scene enacted by a famous actress as it appears to a spectator in the audience.

Both kept silence for a full half an hour. The night was silent, too; only the church-clock measured its course by quarters. Some words were interchanged about the chill of the air; they wrapped their scarves closer round them, resumed their bonnets which they had removed, and again watched.

Towards midnight the teasing, monotonous bark of the house-dog disturbed the quietude of their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen, intending to appease him with a piece of bread; she succeeded. On returning to the dining-room, she found it all dark, Miss Keedlar having extinguished the candle; the outline of her shape was visible near the still open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone asked no questions; she stole to her side. The dog commenced barking furiously; suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too, and not merely to the flow of the millstream; there was a nearer, though a muffled, sound on the



road below the church-yard: a measured, beating, approaching sound; a dull tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. Those who listened, by degrees comprehended its extent. It was not the tread of two, nor of a dozen, nor of a score of men; it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing; the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen from them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough; and this they felt as the troop trod forwards, and seemed actually passing the Rectory. They felt it more when a human voice—though that voice spoke but one word—broke the hush of night.

“Halt, . . .”—C. BRONTË, *Shirley*.

Toward midnight, when the deepening tragedy blackened to the death scene, and all held their breath, and even Graham bit his under lip, and knit his brow, and sat still and struck; when the whole theatre was hushed; when the vision of all eyes centered in one point; when all ears listened towards one quarter—nothing being seen but the white form sunk on a seat, quivering in conflict with her last, her worst-hated, her visibly conquering foe—nothing heard but her throes, her gaspings, breathing yet of mutiny, panting still defiance; when, as it seemed, an inordinate will convulsing a perishing mortal frame, bent it to battle with doom and death, fought every inch of ground, sold every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, *would see, would hear, would breathe, would live*, up to, within, well-nigh *beyond* the moment when death says to all sense and being,—

“Thus far and no farther!”

just then a stir, pregnant with omen, rustled behind the scenes—feet ran, voices spoke. What was it, demanded the whole house. A flame, a smell of smoke replied.—C. BRONTË, *Villette*.

Because sentences of these two types usually have an emotional appeal, they are more often found in narration and description than in exposition and argumentation, which address not the emotions but the mind. To be sure, a writer, in developing an expository or argumentative article, often tries in some part of the paper to arouse his reader's sympathy, and at such times he will use sentences like those in the quotations. Yet such

an appeal is merely secondary to the real aim of exposition or argumentation, which is directed toward the reader's reason. It is also a fact that a complex sentence of moderate length with a main clause and one to three subordinate clauses of cause, time, concession, result, shows by its form a *reasoned* relationship between its parts. Obviously, then, the complex sentence is quite suitable to convey expository or argumentative ideas.

These observations, however, are not hard and fast distinctions. Even though the generalization for the most part holds true that exposition and argument employ more carefully constructed and more formal sentences than do narration and description, still one can find exceptions to the rule. The principal thing to remember is the necessity of taking a fresh and new interest in the different kinds of grammatical sentences; they should be not merely ways of stringing words together but ways of dressing ideas in clothes which fit and are suitable to the occasion.

### III. THE NECESSITY OF SENTENCE VARIETY

The principle of adapting form to content is checked by that of sentence variety. A reader will often be sufficiently pleased by an article which shows effective variation to read it even though its subject matter is foreign to his tastes; on the other hand, he will throw down one which discusses something of vital interest to him if it is couched in monotonous sentences, for a series of sentences similar in length, arrangement, and

structure tries the mind and fatigues the attention. Not realizing the danger of monotony, many students use almost exclusively the most common type of sentence, a simple declaration, loose in structure and normal in word order. Yet there are in actuality a wide number of types from which to choose. Of these we might name simple, complex, and compound sentences; loose, periodic, and balanced sentences; declarative, imperative, exclamatory, and interrogative sentences; sentences employing different word orders, and sentences of one or two words to sentences of a hundred and fifty words.

#### IV. VARIETY: GRAMMATICAL CLASSIFICATION

In the first place one can always vary simple sentences with complex sentences, a method of variation certainly too obvious to need comment. Yet in using it, one must remember the unique function of each kind of sentence and so avoid the pitfalls pointed out in the last chapter under "Sentence Unity" (Nos. 5-8). There are in addition interrogative, exclamatory, imperative, as well as declarative, sentences; and though one must be niggardly in using rhetorical questions and commands ("Sentence Emphasis" No. 3), yet at times they effectively drive home a point. Almost all the sentences of an article, however, should be declarations. In writing process themes or in reporting projects in educational work, a student forgets at times this fact and uses commands throughout his article: "Do this! . . . Do that!" Such a style, commonly called the "recipe style,"

since its proper place is in a cook book, is abrupt and rude rather than gracious and persuasive.

#### V. VARIETY: SHORT AND LONG SENTENCES

If an amateur compares one of his compositions with those of a writer of good repute, he will find that the typical sentence which he writes is shorter than that of the professional, and that the average number of words from sentence to sentence varies less in his case than in that of the experienced writer. Once conscious of these facts, any student can improve his writing. But he should not lengthen his average sentence by padding it out with modifiers of all kinds, since the correct method of increasing it is quite different. By observing carefully the following and preceding sentences, one should see if they cannot be joined to the sentence in question without violation of the principle of unity. Yet even in doing so, a writer must exercise care: two short sentences combined into a compound sentence do not remedy matters, since the effect of the former on the eye and ear is practically the same as that of the latter. He should rather analyze the adjacent sentences to see if one of them cannot logically be reduced to a subordinate clause, to a phrase, or even to a word:

1. (a) We were becalmed for three hours. (b) Suddenly a wind arose. (c) With its aid we drifted toward the sand bar.

2. We were becalmed for three hours; suddenly a wind arose, and with its aid we drifted toward the sand bar.

Obviously the effect of the second sentence differs in no way from that of the three sentences in No. 1. But

if the three short sentences are made into a single sentence, so:

3. After we had been becalmed for three hours, a wind, suddenly arising, drove us toward the sand bar,

the result is that which is desired.

The sentences in No. 1 were combined into No. 3 in two ways. After the three short sentences were analyzed, it was found that (*a*) could be logically subordinated to (*b*) and that (*c*) and (*b*) could be combined with a single predicate. The subordination of one sentence to another is a simple enough procedure; but the method of combining (*c*) and (*b*), though known to all writers, is somewhat less obvious. The latter is called by rhetoricians "reduction of predication" because by means of it one gets rid of verbs. Through this process a writer not only can make one sentence out of two or three sentences but also can reduce a long sentence with two or three verbs into a shorter one with one verb, thus changing at will the average number of words from sentence to sentence and overcoming the second stylistic fault mentioned under this heading, i.e., lack of variety in sentence length.

What is meant by "reduction of predication" can be further understood by study of the following sentences. A sentence such as:

His voice, which is very flexible, at times thunders upon the ear and then again falls until it has the gentleness of that of a child, so great is his command of it (thirty-three words),

by analysis of content and reduction of predication can be simplified to:

His flexible voice at times thunders upon the ear and then again falls with the gentleness of that of a child (twenty-one words).

All sentences, revised in this manner, gain also in power and force. In the first place, a sentence with one or two verbs is usually more carefully built than one with four or five, and consequently more effective; in the second place, verbs must be used judiciously because they are vigorous parts of speech and appeal strongly to the reader's attention. Moderately used and carefully selected, verbs stimulate a writer's style; overused, they produce a weak effect, dissipating the reader's attention instead of concentrating it.

#### VI. VARIETY: SENTENCE ARRANGEMENT

A writer can secure variety in sentence structure by methods less simple than those which have hitherto been suggested. He may, for instance, change the arrangement of the elements of a sentence from the normal order, and thus he will open up to himself endless possibilities of sentence variety. The normal order of a sentence, of course, is subject, verb, and object, any one of which may have modifiers. Yet if this or any other order is maintained without change throughout eight or nine sentences, the result is a style not pleasing to the adult mind:

I opened the door and saw that her room was large and spacious. Toward the north was a window half-open. Toward the west was another through which streamed mellow sunlight. From the tops of both windows to the sills hung tan curtains. Against the east wall was a couch covered with a Paisley shawl and under the rays of the sun the reds, blues, and yellows of the covering became softened into



mysterious composites of color. Along the south wall were open book-cases, containing books, the titles of which glittered as the sun struck them. In the center of the room was a dark mission table. On top of it lay a blown-glass vase which had changed into an iridescent ball of fire under the spell of the sun. Among the chairs, here and there, stood out an over-stuffed armchair with rich tapestry—as gold as the sun itself. On the walls, a shade or two lighter than the curtains, hung water-colors, etchings and Alinari photographs. In this light the walls and pictures seemed unreal and in the whole room one felt the romance of her personality.

Although some of the details of this description may be interesting enough to hold the reader's attention, yet its monotonous style in no way enhances its appeal, but rather detracts from it. Moreover, the formulas employed throughout the paragraph to introduce each sentence ("toward the west," "along the south wall," "in the center," "on its top") give an effect as mechanical as would the drawing of a draftsman, and consequently are particularly ill fitted to convey the sense of "romance" which the room is said to possess.

To be sure, a student can find here and there in the work of standard authors a series of sentences which repeat each other in pattern and sometimes also in words. Such monotony the author purposely plans to make clear to his reader some trait of character, some idea demonstrable in more than one way, or to create for him some monotonous impression such as that produced by the uniform houses of a city block or by the mechanical movements of workers in a factory.

"Ah! revenge is wrong, Pen," pleads the other counselor . . . .  
"It blackens the hearts of men. It distorts their views of right. It sets them to devise evil. It causes them to think unjustly of others.

It is not the noblest return for injury, not even the bravest way of meeting it . . . . " THACKERAY, *The Newcomes*.

. . . . Nature, far above the evil passions of men, soon recovered Her serenity, and smiled upon the guilty battle-ground as she had done before, when it was innocent. The larks sang high above it; the swallows skimmed and dipped and flitted to and fro; the shadows of the flying clouds pursued each other swiftly, over grass and corn and turnip field and wood, and over roof and churchspire in the nestling town among the trees, away into the bright distance on the borders of the sky and earth, where the red sunsets faded. Crops were sown, and grew up, and were gathered in; in the street that had been crimsoned, turned a water-mill; men whistled at the plough; gleaners and haymakers were seen in quiet groups at work; sheep and oxen pastured. Boys whooped and called in fields, to scare away the birds; smoke rose from cottage chimneys. Sabbath bells rang peacefully. Old people lived and died; the timid creatures of the field, and simple flowers of the bush and garden, grew and withered in their destined terms: and all upon the fierce and bloody battle-ground, where thousands upon thousands had been killed in the great fight. —DICKENS, *The Battle of Life*.

In the first of these passages Thackeray uses monotonous sentences as a rhetorical device to impress on the mind the evils of vengeance; in the second, Dickens in a similar fashion conveys the unruffled peacefulness of a country scene. It is to be remembered, however, that both these authors have employed a monotonous style with a definite purpose in mind, quite conscious of the value and the limitations of it.

#### VII. VARIETY: BALANCED, PERIODIC, AND LOOSE SENTENCES

Although the discussion under variety in sentence arrangement pertains more particularly to the way sentences begin than to their internal structure, yet the latter is also subject to change whenever the student so

desires. One way for him to vary this internal pattern is to remember that there are such things as balanced, periodic, and loose sentences and to employ now and again that type which seems suitable to the idea he is putting into words.

Of these three types, the balanced and the periodic are more artificial than the loose sentence. As the student probably knows, a balanced sentence contains antithetical or similar ideas in similar grammatical structure, and the latter aspect of the balanced sentence, i.e., its uniformity of structure, gives it an air of artificiality. Yet the balanced sentence is so important in the development of English prose that, by following the history of the former, one can practically trace the rise and growth of the latter, for the Elizabethans who first experimented with the balanced sentence were also the first to develop a conscious prose style, and Macaulay who perfected the balanced sentence is even today our model for conventional correctness. Since the nineteenth century, writers have tried to free themselves from the stiffness and formality of Macaulay and his disciples and to write prose of a more colloquial, more natural, and less self-conscious kind. Nevertheless, any twentieth-century writer who desires his writing to be effective uses to a great extent parallelism in the construction of his sentences, particularly when the sentence contains balanced ideas. Nothing, for example, could be more clear, adequate, and effective than sentences like the following:

1. For a public man should travel gravely with the fashions, not foppishly before, nor dowdily behind, the central movement of his age.—STEVENSON, *Samuel Pepys*.

2. It was dangerous to trust the sincerity of Augustus; to seem to distrust it was still more dangerous.—GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

3. As geography without history seemeth like a carcass without motion, so history without geography seemeth like a vagrant without a habitation.—CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH, *History of Virginia*.

At times this balance is an integral part of the sentence, affecting words, phrases, or subordinate clauses (e.g., sentence 1); at times it dominates the sentence as a whole so that the latter falls into two or more parts, all of which are main clauses (e.g., sentences 2 and 3).

Whenever parallelism is to be found in a sentence, it always carries with it certain advantages and disadvantages, and these, particularly the latter, become more exaggerated according to whether the elements affected by the balance are grammatically important or unimportant. The sound of the balanced sentence, its rise and fall, are pleasant to the ear; its form and structure, moreover, make sharp and clear the ideas expressed. In addition, balance is so necessary to English style that parallelism will be found frequently not only in a single sentence but through several successive sentences, and sometimes it will dominate the structure of a whole paragraph. Yet the balanced sentence is an artificial and self-conscious thing; and if it pervades a student's style, particularly in the form of sentences 2 and 3 in the preceding illustration, his writing will lose naturalness and spontaneity.

The periodic sentence is still more artificial in form than the balanced sentence in that it is consciously built up to secure suspense by means of a highly elaborated sentence structure hardly ever employed in ordinary conversation. The periodic sentence contains one main clause preceded by several subordinate clauses and phrases, so keeping its grammatical and logical sense incomplete until the very end. An illustration of a highly developed periodic sentence is the long sentence, quoted from *Villette* on page 100. Although its grammatical sense is really complete before its last word, it, like many other sentences of its kind, approximates the definition of a periodic sentence close enough to be classified as such. A more simple example is the following:

Although Biddle, senior partner of *Biddle and Skiddles, Undertakers* had laid out many of his deceased neighbors and friends, although he had clothed many a pain-racked body in its last covering, had clamped down many a coffin lid and had comforted many a widow and orphan with the transiency of flesh and the indestructibility of the human soul, until now, namely on the sixteenth of May at eight o'clock, he had never met Death face to face.

With a little thought one can become aware of the value of the periodic sentence. Through skilful use of anticlimax, for instance, a writer can secure a humorous effect. This he brings about by wording the subordinate clauses so that the reader is led to expect an important finale although he actually finds there not an important idea but one that is whimsical and trifling. Mr. Lugg's eulogy of a plain boiled potato is a good, if somewhat

self-conscious, illustration of a periodic sentence put to a comic use.

“Though France may lead the world,” said Mr. Lugg, “in lucid prose, though her provinces may be rich in history and in beauty, though Paris may outrival London in art, music, and style, not to mention those culinary concoctions which are fragrant with spices, truffles and wine, I have yet to find the Frenchman, even an educated one who has been to England and can speak English, who has perspicacity enough to appreciate the deliciousness of a plain-boiled potato.”

But whether used humorously or seriously, the periodic sentence has power and force because through its very form it zealously adheres to the principles of unity and emphasis. In addition, the sound of a periodic sentence has a decided grandeur; like a phrase on an organ which grows in volume as it progresses, so the periodic sentence accumulates a resonance which demonstrates well the possibilities of English prose. Yet because it is built up to secure suspense, an artistic and self-conscious thing in sentence arrangement as in drama, it is an unnatural kind of sentence. Since one seldom, if ever, uses it in speaking, it has no place in informal prose (such as one uses in writing letters and in giving reports or lectures in a classroom); and even in formal prose, one cannot employ it frequently without producing the bombastic and turgid effect attained by the soap-box orator.

In speaking informally and in writing to each other, we usually express ourselves by means of loose sentences—sentences which at one or more places before the end make complete grammatical and logical sense. Because the loose sentence is natural to our speech, it is found the



most often of the three types of sentences; in fact, prose of the Old and Middle English period used almost exclusively the loose sentence, often long and straggling in form. With the development of style, however, and the evolution of the principles which govern the grammatical and rhetorical form of the English sentence, the loose sentence became moderate in length and firm in structure. Yet in the hands of someone like Borrow, long loose sentences of almost a formless kind can exercise a charm difficult to analyze.

And to the school I went, where I read the Latin tongue and the Greek letter, with a nice old clergyman who sat behind a black oaken desk, with a huge Elzevir Flaccus before him, in a long gloomy kind of hall, with a broken stone floor, the roof festooned with cobwebs, the walls considerably dilapidated and covered with strange figures and hieroglyphics, evidently produced by the application of burnt stick; and there I made acquaintance with the Protestant young gentlemen of the place, who, with whatever *éclat* they might appear at church on a Sunday, did assuredly not exhibit to much advantage in the schoolroom on the week days, either with respect to clothes or looks.—BORROW, *Lavengro*.

In this sentence and in others like it, sometimes running through a whole paragraph, Borrow has caught the ease and simplicity of natural utterance. Such a style results in a sincerity and lack of affectation peculiarly adapted to an autobiography like *Lavengro*; yet an amateur, in trying to imitate Borrow, would have difficulty in not producing a piece of prose, incoherent, chaotic, and ineffective. Unless a student has a decided flare for writing, he had best be conservative and model his loose sentences upon those of Macaulay and Gibbon rather

than upon those of Borrow or Carlyle. Although he should try to have his loose sentences sound straightforward and natural, he should also see that they are carefully planned and not unwieldy in structure.

Whereas the balanced sentence and the periodic sentence are euphonious because of their form, the sound of a loose sentence, whether it is cacophonous or otherwise, depends upon the ear of the writer, upon the words he chooses and the way he combines them into phrases and clauses. The following quotation from Lamb illustrates the telling effect a writer can secure if he fits sense to sound:

. . . . Methought I was upon the ocean billows at some sea nuptials, riding and mounted high, with the customary train sounding their conchs before me (I, myself, you may be sure, the *leading god*), and jollily we went careering over the main, till just where Ino Leucothea should have greeted me (I think it was Ino) with a white embrace, the billows gradually subsided, fell from the sea roughness to a sea calm, and thence to a river motion, and that river (as it happens in the familiarization of dreams) was no other place than the gentle Thames, which landed me in the wafture of a placid wave or two, alone, safe, and inglorious, somewhere at the foot of Lambeth palace.—LAMB, *Witches, and Other Night Fears*.

Anyone who reads this sentence aloud will note how its sound subsides “from a sea roughness to a sea calm, and thence to a river motion” which carries one along with Lamb to Lambeth palace and the end of the sentence. This effect the author produces not by using onomatopoeic words, alliteration, assonance, and other self-conscious devices, but by skilfully beginning with a sentence structure choppy because of the introduction of many

short phrases, and by gradually progressing to a smoother one by the elimination of such phrases.

#### VIII. ARE YOU AMBITIOUS?

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to give the ambitious student an idea how to secure a readable style. At first his efforts at effectiveness may sound self-conscious and unnatural, but as he practices writing sentences, each of which nicely fits the idea he has in mind, and paragraphs, consisting now of various kinds of sentences, now of sentences similar in pattern, form and length, all aimed at a planned effect, bit by bit he will master the possibilities of the English sentence and develop an habitual style of which he will be proud.

*Exercise 1:* Criticize the sentences in the following paragraphs with respect to (1) adaptation of form to content and (2) sentence variety.

.... I had to traverse waste halls and mysterious galleries, where the rays of the lamp extended but a short distance around me. I walked, as it were, in a mere halo of light, walled in by impenetrable darkness. The vaulted corridors were as caverns; the ceilings of the hall were lost in gloom. I recalled all that had been said of the danger from interlopers in these remote and ruined apartments. Might not some vagrant foe be lurking before or behind me, in the outer darkness? My own shadow, cast upon the wall, began to disturb me. The echoes of my own foot-steps along the corridors made me pause and look around. I was traversing scenes fraught with dismal recollections. One dark passage led down to the mosque where Yusef, the Moorish monarch, the finisher of the Alhambra, had been basely murdered. In another place I trod the gallery where another monarch had been struck down by the poniard of a relative whom he had thwarted in his love.—IRVING, *The Alhambra*.

In the course of a few evenings a thorough change took place in the scene and its associations. The moon, which when I took possession of my new apartments was invisible, gradually gained each eve-

ning upon the darkness of the night, and at length rolled in full splendor above the towers pouring a flood of tempered light into every court and hall. The garden beneath my window, before wrapped in gloom, was gently lighted up; the orange and citron trees were tipped with silver; the fountain sparkled in the moon-beams, and even the blush of the rose was faintly visible.—*Ibid.*

*Exercise 2:* (a) Write a periodic sentence with serious intent. (b) Write one with humorous intent. (c) Write a balanced sentence. (d) Write a loose sentence in which sound fits sense.

*Exercise 3:* Rewrite the paragraph on pages 105-6 effectively. Feel free to omit or to change any details.

*Exercise 4:* Rewrite two pages of some preceding theme, putting into practice what you have learned in this chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### WORDS

#### I. WHAT WORDS ARE IN "GOOD USE"

The words which we employ in writing are determined by two things: "good use" and effectiveness. The former means the usage of standard literature, which is determined not by books and periodicals of today (since no one can tell which of the new usages found in them will remain in the language) but by those of fifty years or so ago. Three touchstones of good usage exist: a word to be in good use must be in present, national, and reputable use. The requirement of *present* usage means that archaic, obsolete expressions (words found in Shakespeare or Milton perhaps but not in later writers) are not acceptable current English. In Italian there is a rule that any word used by Dante may be employed today; but in English we have no such rule. If words have not been in written usage for perhaps the last century or so, one should not employ them. The requirement of *national* usage signifies that a word which is proper in England is not necessarily good in America. There are very considerable differences in the vocabulary of the two countries, particularly in the names of inventions and all sorts of recent developments (e.g., the words used in railroading are largely quite different). The fact

that *lift* is universal English usage for *passenger elevator*, that *tram* is used for *street car*, etc., does not justify an American writer in using these terms in his writing. In fact, if he does so, he is being as affected as the American who speaks with an Oxford accent. On the other hand, in writing for publication, if one has to choose between a word that is only in American usage and one that is in both American and English usage, it is certainly best to prefer the latter. Thus, for instance one would use *attitude* rather than *reaction* in such a sentence as: "My attitude toward her marriage was not what she expected." Finally the criterion of *reputable* usage implies that a word must be not merely in colloquial use but in the vocabulary of standard books. Words in colloquial use may be quite proper in conversation or even in letters between close friends; they may be used also in conversation reported in a narrative; but, unless they are in literary usage, they are improper in formal writing.

## II. DICTIONARIES AND GOOD USAGE

A writer should consult a dictionary whenever he is not sure of the meaning of a word or of its correct usage. Although there is nothing more educative than the "dictionary habit," many students pass through high school and college without acquiring it and without feeling even the necessity of owning a dictionary. A dictionary will help distinguish words such as *illusion* from *allusion*, *affect* from *effect*, *except* from *accept*, *purpose* from *propose*, and *insurance* from *assurance*; it will tell the true



meaning of *aggravate*, *transpire*, *depot*, *awful*, and other words which are commonly misused. Yet a dictionary's definition of a word is not the final authority as to its best usage, for it is not from ordinary, concise dictionaries (particularly those of inferior worth) that one gains an idiomatic sense of words but rather from the books of standard authors. A dictionary, for example, may give *characteristic* as a synonym for *typical*; but, in spite of this definition, *typical* is not used idiomatically in the following sentence:

The Gettysburg speech, an address of some two hundred words, is *typical* of Lincoln's dignity, earnestness, and self-control.

*Typical* means, not merely *characteristic*, but *characteristic of a class or group*. With this limitation in mind, one can easily see that *typical of Lincoln's dignity*, etc., is not idiomatic. For instance, "Such conduct is typical of John," means what John has done is characteristic of the moral *class* to which he belongs.

The weakness of dictionaries which merely defined led Samuel Johnson<sup>1</sup> in the eighteenth century to compile a dictionary copiously illustrated with quotations from English literature. This plan was more fully developed by Dr. Charles Richardson, whose *New Dictionary of the English Language*<sup>2</sup> still remains a valuable collection of literary illustrations. Finally the method was used on a much larger scale by the Oxford *New English Dictionary*, the most complete and full diction-

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755).

<sup>2</sup> London, 1836-37.

ary of English in existence. It fills many volumes, the first part appearing in 1884 with succeeding parts issued up to 1928 when the whole work was completed.<sup>1</sup> A dictionary such as this is of value not only to the philologist who is interested in the history of words but also to anyone who wishes to ascertain the best usage of a certain word, by noting how it is employed by standard authors. If a student has not access to the Oxford *New English Dictionary*, he can probably find in some library near at hand one of the following comprehensive dictionaries:

*Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Based on the International Dictionary of 1890 and 1900* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1909).

*The Century Dictionary. An Encyclopaedic Lexicon of the English Language* (New York: Century Co., 1889-91).

*New Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1913).

Since even a good one-volume dictionary<sup>2</sup> will cite at times examples of the usage of a word, a writer should

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary. A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, edited by Dr. James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, and C. T. Onions; (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884-1928).

<sup>2</sup> The following abridged dictionaries are recommended to a student of English who desires to purchase one: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911); any of the small Websterian dictionaries published by G. & C. Merriam Co. or the American Book Co. (one must observe the publishing house, for some dictionaries are Websterian only in name); any of the small dictionaries abridged from the *New Standard Dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co.).

form the habit of observing such citations as well as the definition given. Moreover, the etymology of a word will often help one to use it correctly; a good author who feels the power of words does not apply words such as *virile* and *virility* (from *vir* "man") to a woman unless he means to imply that she has the qualities of a man, and does not use a word such as *decimate* in the sense of *wipe out*, since it etymologically means *destroy one in ten* (*decimare*, "to take a tenth," from *decem*, "ten"). Similarly a careful writer is aware that *quite* means *wholly, completely*, not *rather*; that one can *portray* an object or the appearance of a person but not an abstraction like passion, pathos, humor; that *homely* signifies *belonging to the home, suggestive of home-life* rather than *commonplace, uncomely*.

Although every word in English has a specific meaning, many words through careless usage have lost their original force. To this class belong those words originally descriptive or evaluating in nature which have become terms of general commendation or condemnation: *nice, lovely, awful*, etc. An effective writer does not use a word like *fine* in the vague sense of *good* but applies it properly to objects or works in which detailed, exquisite artistry is found. He will not call a symphony *fine*, but he will speak of *fine* Brussels lace or *fine* wood-carving. There is, moreover, another objection to the loose use of such words besides the fact that in their secondary sense they are not precise in meaning. In becoming vague terms, synonymous with *good* or *bad*, they have lost all their

emotional and sensuous appeal and consequently most of their strength. *Gorgeous*, for example, means *adorned with rich or brilliant colors, sumptuously gay or showy*; so employed, it makes a concrete appeal to one's sense of sight and touch. To use it as an epithet of strong approbation in its colloquial sense of *excellent* is to deprive it of all connotation, all emotional power, and to make it equivalent to a vague comment. In fact, one of the reasons that cultivated readers regard men like Conrad, Shaw, and Masfield as *good* modern authors is that they use words with all their original force; an amateur who wishes to write effective and virile prose must do likewise.

*Exercise:* Consult a good dictionary for the best usage of the following words, define them, and use them effectively in sentences: *awful, beautiful, big, cheap, cute, decimate, exquisite, elegant, fearful, fierce, fine, frightful, funny, grand, great, gorgeous, homely, horrible, lovely, mean, nice, portray, quite, splendid, terrible, typical, unique, virile, wonderful.*

### III. COMMON IMPROPER USAGES

*above* is not an adjective; consequently it should not be used as one.

Wrong: The *above* facts prove the senator wrong in his assertion.  
Right: The facts just stated, etc.

*above mentioned, aforesaid*, and similar expressions should be kept for legal documents.

*affect, effect*, should not be confused in meaning. *Affect*, a verb, means *influence*; *effect*, a verb, means *accomplish, bring to pass*. *Affect* is not correctly used as a noun; *effect*, a noun, means *result*.

Right: His slow death *affected* me terribly.

Right: His slow death had a terrible *effect* upon me.

Right: The council tried its best to *effect* peace between the two leaders.

*aggravate* is not proper in the sense of *irritate*, *provoke*. Aggravate means *make worse*; i.e., a disease or evil may be aggravated but not a person.

*all right* should be written as two words.

*alternative* is properly used of two things, not more.

Right: He was faced with the *alternative* of death and honor or of life and disgrace.

*as*, alone, should not be used to connect nouns. Use *like* or *such as*.

Wrong: Men *as* Father and Uncle John should know better.

Right: Men *like* (*such as*) Father and Uncle John should know better.

*balance* should not be used in the sense of *remainder* except in bookkeeping.

Wrong: The *balance* of the day she spent sitting in the sun.

*center in*, not *center around*, is the correct idiom.

*claim* means *demand as one's due*, not *assert*, *maintain*, *declare*, *state*, *say*, and should be followed by a direct object, not a *that* clause.

Poor: He *claimed* that the decision was unfair to all concerned.

Right: He *maintained* that the decision, etc.

Right: He *claimed* the presidency by right of election.

*crowd* is a vulgarism when applied to the particular group with which one associates.

Wrong: At my last reunion none of my old *crowd* was back.

*data* is plural; the singular, *datum*, is practically never used. Compare *stratum*,—*a*; *phenomenon*,—*a*.

*deathly* should be differentiated from *deadly*. *Deathly* signifies *deathlike*; *deadly*, *capable of causing death*.

Right: She was *deathly* white.

Right: The house was *deathly* still.

Right: The poison has a *deadly* effect.

*different from*, not *different than* or *different to*, is the correct idiom.

*enthuse*, a verb made from *enthusiasm*, has not been accepted into good usage.

*fix* means not *repair* but *fasten, establish firmly*.

Poor: He was very popular with the neighborhood children, for he *fixed* all their broken toys.

Right: He was very popular with the neighborhood children, for he *mended* all their broken toys.

Right: By means of adhesive tape he *fixed* the tube to the gas stove.

*fly, flee, flow*, have the following principal parts: *fly, flew, flown*; *flee, fled, fled*; *flow, flowed, flowed*, respectively. The hero should say to the heroine "*Flee* with me," not "*Fly* with me," unless he is using a figure of speech or has an aeroplane in mind.

*folks* does not mean relatives; it is, in fact, no longer used in the plural in any sense. The singular, *folk*, signifies people.

Wrong: When I was three, my *folks* moved into Chicago.

Right: When I was three, my *family* moved into Chicago.

Wrong: The little *folks* were pleased with the Christmas tree.

Right: The little *folk* (or the *children*) were pleased, etc.

*got*, not *gotten*, is the past participle of *get*. The use, moreover, of *have got* in the meaning of *have* is a colloquialism.

Wrong: I would have finished school with my twin sister if I *had* not *gotten* seriously ill the last year.



Right: I should have finished school with my twin sister if I *had not got* seriously ill the last year.

Wrong: *Have you got* the book? (unless it means have you secured or obtained the book).

Right: *Have you* the book?

*graduate* is correctly used in a sentence like this: "I was *graduated* from the *Girl's High School* in Brooklyn in 1928." Institutions *graduate* students, but a student does not *graduate*.

*human* is not properly used as a noun; *human being(s)* is the correct expression.

*individual*, as a noun, properly means *a single human being as opposed to a group, such as society, the family, etc.* It is a vulgarism when used to signify *a person, a man*.

Wrong: He is an *individual* with an unpleasant personality.

Right: He is *a man*, etc.

Right: I speak as an *individual* and not as a member of the democratic party.

*ingenious* must not be confused with *ingenuous*. The former means *cleverly contrived*; the latter, *frank, naïve, innocent*.

*in this line, along these lines*, meaningless phrases, taken over perhaps from the trade jargon of salesmen or from military tactics, are not found in good writing. As commonly used by students, these phrases are either redundant or vague in meaning. In the first case, they ought to be omitted; in the second, replaced by exact phrases.

Poor: I was quite efficient *in the line of music*.

Right: I was quite efficient *in music*.

Poor: As children we knew where the earliest spring flowers grew, we marked the coming of the birds from the spring robin to the summer tanager, we collected all kinds of butterflies and insects, and we spent hours watching ant hills and woodchuck holes. And I, for one, have never lost my interest *along these lines*.

Right: And I, for one, have never lost my interest *in plant and animal life; in nature study; in such things*, etc.

*lady*, used to indicate a mere distinction of sex, is a vulgarism; there is nothing derogatory in the word *woman*, any more than in the word *man*. *Lady* is properly used where one would use *gentleman* in speaking of a *man*.

Wrong: I opened the door and beheld a *lady* who was vaguely familiar to me.

Right: I opened the door and beheld a *woman*, etc.

Right: Her hands and her speech marked her a *lady*.

*lead*; The past tense of *lead* is spelt *led*.

*lend, lent, lent*.

Wrong: I *loaned* him a book which he never returned.

Right: I *lent* him a book, etc.

*liable* must not be confused with *likely*. *Likely* refers to a contingent event regarded as very probable; *liable*, to a contingency which is not only probable but also undesirable.

Poor: He is *liable* to turn up any minute.

Right: He is *likely* to turn up any minute.

Right: The doctor says he is *liable* to die any minute.

*like* is a preposition; *as*, a conjunction. *Like* governs the objective case.

Wrong: He did it just *like* I told him to.

Right: He did it just *as* I told him to.

Right: I'll never be clever *like* him.

*lose* and *loose*, as verbs, must not be confused: *Lose* (lūz), *lost*, *lost*; *loose* (lūs), *loosed*, *loosed*.

*may* and *can* should not be used interchangeably.

*party*, used for person, is a vulgarism.

Wrong: The *party* I am looking for has a scar on his left cheek.

Right: The *person*, etc.

*peeve* and *peeved* are coinages, not in recognized usage.

*pep* is slang.

*principal*, as a noun, means *the head of an organization*; *principle*, as a noun, signifies *a general law or truth*, *Principal*, as an adjective, means *leading, chief*; *principle* is never used as an adjective.

*proposition* signifies *something which is proposed*; it must not be used in a loose, vague fashion.

Poor: Raising turkeys is an unsatisfactory *proposition*.

Right: Raising turkeys is an unsatisfactory *undertaking*.

*proved*, not *proven*, is the past participle of *prove*.

*raise*, used as a noun, is a colloquialism. As a verb, it can be applied to *the raising of animals* but not to the *rearing of children*.

Wrong: I got a *raise* in salary of five hundred a year.

Right: I got an *increase* in salary of five hundred, etc.

Wrong: I was *raised* in the mountains of Virginia.

Right: I was *brought up, reared*, etc., in the mountains, etc.

*same*, as a pronoun, differs from the other pronouns in that it can refer to the idea expressed by a clause or phrase. On the other hand, except in legal or commercial documents, one should not use it with a definite noun as an antecedent.

Right: John ran downstairs and I did the *same*.

Wrong: I looked into the room and, seeing her there, I entered the *same*.

Right: I looked into the room and, seeing her there, I entered *it*.

*show*, meaning a *dramatic performance in a theater*, is a colloquialism.

Poor: The actors hate matinees, for giving two *shows* in one day quite tires them out.

Poor: Do you think the *show* at The Criterion (I forget its name) would amuse Aunt Helen?

*so* and *such* should not be used to strengthen adjectives unless they are followed by *that* (or *as*) clauses.

Poor: I'm *so* tired.

Right: I'm *so* tired *that* I can hardly keep my eyes open.

Poor: I never saw *such* a sunset.

Right: I never saw *such* a sunset *as that* we looked at this evening.

*thrill*, as a noun, means "an actual nervous tremor caused by some intense emotion," such as fear, joy, etc.; *thrill*, as a verb, has a corresponding meaning. These words should not be used to signify mere pleasure or interest.

Poor: He's the most *thrilling* man; he's been everywhere, knows everybody and everything, and yet he can't be more than thirty.

Right: He's a most *interesting* man; he's, etc.

Right: The details of the murder caused a *thrill* of indignation to run through the community.

*transpire* means to *escape from secrecy to notice*; it is misused in the sense of *occur*, *happen*.

*visit* does not mean *converse*, *talk with*.

Wrong: In the kitchen of Mrs. Payne's home, Sally Brown, the town gossip, *is visiting* with Mrs. Payne's mother-in-law.

*ways*, as an adverb, is colloquial; the proper form is *way*.

Right: A little *way* back from the main road stood an old, deserted house.

*worth while* should be written as two words. It may be used predicatively after verbs like *seem*, *appear*, or some part of *be*; it is not idiomatic to place it before a noun. Moreover, *worth while* means worth time, expense, and trouble; it has no moral connotation.

Wrong: A mother should go to a moving picture first to ascertain that it will have a *worth-while* effect on the child.

Right: A mother should go to a moving picture first to ascertain that it will have a *beneficial* effect, etc.

Right: The trip up the river to Angkor is tiresome and costly but quite *worth while*.

To this list might be added many foreign words which have not come into general usage. In particular, writers who sprinkle their sentences with French words such as *recherché*, *chic*, and *beau monde*, gain thereby an effect of insincerity and pretense. In addition, one should avoid the widespread habit of using nouns as adjectives, a tendency observable in newspapers, magazines, and the work of careless writers. In students' themes, one comes upon combinations, such as *room order*, *language improvement*, *dictionary comment*, *note piles*, *speech slackness*, *conservation of soil fertility congresses*, which are not found in the writing of good modern authors and which are at times ambiguous in meaning; on the other hand, such virtual compounds as *classroom*, *bedspread*, *choir boy*, and *teapot* have long been recognized as proper.

Again, it is good usage which decides what is and what is not acceptable. Good usage likewise determines those abbreviations and contractions which are to be used and those which are to be avoided. In the case of abbreviations, however, reputable publishers rather than authors determine what is good form. "Dr.," "Mr.," "Mrs.," for example, are correct in articles and stories as well as in the salutation in a letter and on the address of an envelope. Such abbreviations as "e.g.," "i.e.," "viz.," etc., are also acceptable. Abbreviations for states, however, are not to be used in the text of a manuscript, and careful business houses object to them in letters. Further, "Wed.," "Nov.," "Prof.," "Rev.," "lb.," "ct.," "mi.," "yds.," etc., are considered practically vulgarisms if they appear in formal writing. For a similar reason good authors avoid contractions such as "phone," "bus," "el'," "pol. econ.," "photo'," "auto'," etc.

#### IV. WHAT IS MEANT BY "EFFECTIVE WORDS"

On effective use of words it is possible to give only general counsels. The ideal, of course, is to use the one word which exactly expresses the meaning. English has a great treasury of words, many of them almost synonymous with other words. There are relatively few real synonyms, however; as in the case of *characteristic* for *typical*, which we have just discussed, most words listed in dictionaries as synonyms differ more or less in meaning or in idiomatic usage. Thus the words given as synonyms for *house* differ in meaning as to size, splendor,



and usage. Similarly with *road*, *town*, or verbs like *call*, *go*, the writer's task is to select from such near-synonyms the particular word which fits his meaning. A beginner might well keep in mind an episode in *Sentimental Tommy*. Tommy loses a contest because he spends most of the time set aside for writing an essay, in hunting for a forgotten word which he feels he *must* find to express precisely his idea. No other word could possibly take its place. This impulse, which makes him fail to win the competition, is the same which later brings him success as an author. The moral is obvious.

#### V. HOW TO AVOID WORDINESS

If every word in a sentence is chosen with care, the resulting effect will never be verbose. Anyone, moreover, who cultivates a style free from verbosity will both write forcefully and speak, if not effectively, at least not tiresomely, for the writing of precise English is bound to affect a person's mental habits to such an extent that he will be too self-conscious to talk on about nothing and so bore all who unfortunately must listen. If a writer is aware of the value of words, he cannot but write succinctly. The trouble with a student who produces a sentence like this:

I had been interested in my dream, and now it had for me that hopeless, lost aspect of something which I never could find again is that words have little weight in his mind. What he means to say is simply:

I had been interested in my dream, and now it was lost forever.

Repression and simplicity of style always add force to human utterance whether it be written or spoken. Students too often forget this fact, and overuse words like *very*, *extremely*, etc. Such words weaken rather than strengthen expression. *He worked hard* is more impressive than *he worked very hard*. Perhaps the reason for this difference will be clear if one considers the common expression: *It is very necessary that you do . . . so and so*. *Necessary* means *essential*, *indispensable*; it is an absolute word, which is so strong that it cannot be strengthened. Now if a writer puts *very* before it, he reveals the fact that he thinks necessary means *advisable* and that he is not aware of its true and real significance. The same thing may be said concerning the use of "intensives" like *immensely*, *tremendously*, *far*, (*far weaker*, for example): they weaken one's effect. In fact, a student might well go through his themes and strike out *very* (and similar words) wherever they occur. If a writer does not use them but employs the right adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs, the reader will sense the fact that he intends the full meaning of every word; and thus every word will produce its intended effect.

## VI. VIGOROUS AND FORCEFUL PROSE

### CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT WORDS

As we have said before, words which address the emotions and senses are more powerful than those which appeal to the reason alone. To say concretely with James that the baby's universe is a "big blooming buzz-

ing Confusion" is surely more effective than to describe it as a concept which consists of many unanalyzed and undifferentiated sensations. When we read "Worlds upon worlds stretch through endless space," we imaginatively respond to the idea; but if it is worded "The universe is infinite," we remain unmoved. Concrete words were used by our forefathers long before their minds were capable of abstract thinking. King Alfred, in the ninth century, for example, found great difficulty in translating Boethius because the English tongue of his time was not adapted to the expression of philosophical thought. And still today, we and all other peoples respond more to words which have an emotional and sensory appeal than to those which lack it, for primary impulses do not die in the human race.

To be sure, in scientific, legal, or philosophical discussions one has to employ *to some extent* abstract terms; in such cases, however, one can always have recourse to concrete illustrations and examples to make explicit one's thought. But discussions which abound in scientific, legal, or philosophical terms should be directed toward a professional audience: a classroom interested in the subject, the readers of a learned journal, the members of a scientific or professional society. The abstract terminology by which chemistry designates different compounds and processes is not understood by those without scientific training, and so, if a chemist cares enough about his science to make it comprehensible to the general public, he will, as far as he possibly can,

avoid such terms when addressing a layman. Students who write on the theory and philosophy of education are particularly apt to forget this caution. After all, educators are dealing not with elusive material and highly abstract thinking but with a concrete problem: how to develop children and adolescents into the best kind of human beings. Surely the various solutions of this problem, with which all adults are concerned, should be expressed in a language which the average man understands. But unfortunately educators have allowed themselves to develop a vocabulary, comprehensible only to their profession; and their specialized way of thinking has in turn affected their whole style and manner of writing. As a result, students do not always grasp as their own the idea involved; and at times, not quite aware of this fact, they repeat terms and expressions with the feeling that thereby they are reproducing what they have read or heard in a lecture. The following is an example of this reprehensible habit:

The growing tendency in our public school system to respect individual type differences by providing partial differentiation during the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades assumes that stress should be laid upon the fundamental objectives of helping to establish those habits, attitudes, appreciations that are so indispensable to the proper conduct of citizens, consumers and producers. Formerly the efforts have been toward a solution of the problem without sacrificing uniformity but now along the lines of this tendency has arisen, as an outgrowth, the junior high school movement which aims to focus the attention on the recognition and direction of the varying diversified manifestations in child life of a certain period. The very nature of child life in the critical period of the junior high school age implies the greatest diversity consistent with efficient organization. The widely diversified life experiences demanded by the organ-

ization activities of the junior high school provide ample scope for the exploration essential to the formation of character and to the discovery of a life vocation. Realizing these things, the courses of the junior high school have been organized into constants and variables, for any curriculum at this level must be flexible to allow for necessary changes.

Surely a student who comprehends an idea should be able to express it in more simple, straightforward language than that.

#### THE POWER OF VERBS AND NOUNS

Of the different parts of speech which constitute a sentence, the nouns and finite verbs express the essential idea, and all modifiers merely restrict and elaborate it. Consequently one who writes live prose employs vigorous nouns and verbs and is niggardly in regard to adjectives and adverbs so that the latter will not overshadow the stronger elements of the sentence. Beginners often try to give vivid expression to an idea by means of a sentence which consists of many modifiers, and at the same time they will employ generalized instead of specific words for the subject and predicate. In pursuing such a method, they are doing just the wrong thing: to write "He went along with tottering steps" is by no means as effective as "He tottered along." Particularly in a description is an amateur apt to make this mistake; often in a student's theme sentence after sentence will have as a main verb some part of the copulative *to be* (the most colorless verb in the English language) and the weak *is* or *was* will be bolstered up by many modifiers. An example such as:

In the corner was a rusty stove, supported by three wobbly legs and a stick

illustrates the type of sentence which commonly occurs. Even though one has not a gift for writing, anyone can avoid this kind of sentence. It requires only careful observation and a little practice to write instead:

In the corner three wobbly legs and a stick supported a rusty stove.

The incorrect and ineffective use of verbs like *could be seen*, *could be heard*, *seem*, is also to be condemned. Not only are they open to the same objection which was made in regard to the copulative *to be*, for in certain usages they have no more force, but often, when employed in this passive sense, they are really misused. The verb *seemed* in a sentence such as "The cake seemed so good that I ate it all up" quite contradicts the actual idea the writer has in mind. He surely means not that "The cake appeared to taste so good that I ate it all up" but that "The cake actually tasted so good that I ate it all up." The verbs *seen* and *heard* are employed in the passive voice in a similar thoughtless fashion with the result that the main idea of the sentence is expressed by some subordinate part of speech, such as a participial phrase, and sentence unity is consequently violated ("Unity," No. 7):

Hanging from the carved wood on the walls unsightly cobwebs could be seen.

In sentences like this the verb, *could be seen*, has really no meaning. Since, moreover, the main action of the sen-



tence is contained in the participle, *hanging*, the latter ought to be the finite verb:

From the carved wood on the walls hung unsightly cobwebs.

#### TRITE WORDS AND PHRASES

*Could be heard, could be seen, seem*, and other circumlocutions occur so frequently in the prose of second-rate writers that students have quite lost the sense of their true meaning. Other phrases, which differ from these in that they are correct enough, have likewise suffered from overuse. "Cherry lips," "golden hair," "pearly teeth," are no longer found in good prose or poetry of the twentieth century unless a writer is poking fun at his heroine. "My blood boils," "I never want to see you again," "I shall strangle him with my naked hands" and similar phrases sounded insincere enough when they first appeared in melodrama, but now, taken over from it into cinema captions, they provoke mirth in a sophisticated adult. "Politeness is to do and say the kindest thing in the kindest way" and other trite aphorisms belong in the album of the mid-Victorian maiden and should not be resurrected in the twentieth century as profound and original truths. In writing of infants, writers are particularly prone to use hackneyed phrases: "rosebud mouths," "dimpled elbows," "chubby hands," etc. The epithet *little*, in fact, so often turns up in a description of a child that it loses all its exact meaning and becomes an affected mannerism. "The *little* darling holds his *little* horse fast in his *little* hands and looks at

me, determination written all over his *little* face," is a parody of this kind of fault. All tiny children, if normal, have *little* hands, feet, and faces; they wear *small* shoes, bonnets, and dresses; the reader is well aware of the size of a two-year old and all his accessories without being repeatedly reminded of it. As for the *little horse*, sometimes it is no smaller than other toy horses; and *little*, in fact, is applied to it in a wholly sentimental spirit.

#### FIGURES OF SPEECH

Likewise thread-worn figures of speech give a commonplace atmosphere to one's prose: "trees standing like sentinels," "God's great out-of doors," "babbling or gurgling streams," "the green grass like carpet under one's feet." Even original figures of speech are difficult things to employ effectively. This statement is particularly true of personification, for, in using this figure of speech, one always is in danger of giving life to some inanimate thing without actually feeling that it is alive and without any hope of convincing the reader that it has life. Such insincere personification is called by Ruskin the "pathetic fallacy" (*Modern Painters*, III, iv, 12) and is condemned by him for the reason already stated. To the Romans or Greeks, for example, the north wind puffing out his cheeks was a believable figure; the Athenians, in fact, had an altar to Boreas and offered sacrifices at it for their preservation. But Americans and most Europeans of today cannot believe for a moment in such a personification, and those of us who use it do so with a certain self-consciousness which is not in keeping with

the writing of straightforward, vigorous English. An outburst such as this may be "pretty" writing:

Spring stretched her limbs and rose early one April morning. As she passed, the crocuses shyly stretched out pale fingers, the skunk cabbages lifted their bourgeois heads; the blood-root looked at her face and drank deep of the passion of the earth. As she passed, the romantic call of the flicker heralded her flight from valley to hill, along sluggish stream and winding road and, wherever her feet touched, there was life where before there had been death,

but it is not sincere, and unless one desires to have an air of affectation about one's prose, one had better avoid giving life to inanimate objects. Other figures of speech besides personification, such as similes and metaphors, also are snares to the unwary. A simile or metaphor to be effective must be both spontaneous and appropriate; the student who wrote:

A theme is like a house; the introduction is the front porch; the body, the house itself; the conclusion, the back porch

might defend the simile on the grounds of its appropriateness, particularly if he were devoid of a sense of humor, but he surely could not maintain that it sounded spontaneous. The minute one feels the effort of evolving a figure of speech, one had better eliminate it from the sentence. On the other hand, although the metaphor in the following sentence is spontaneous enough, it is not suitable to the material of the sentence as a whole:

To this room the ragpickers brought the fruits of their daily labor.

One should also be careful to avoid mixed figures of speech, such as:

I accepted what the teacher said as dew from heaven and digested it as well as I could,

for two different figures in close juxtaposition often give a sentence a ludicrous turn, not desired by the writer. If the student writes as naturally as he can, he need not fear that his figures will lack spontaneity. In fact, he need never strive for figurative language, for all of us constantly use figures of speech without being conscious of the fact. That we are not aware that we are employing them is the very reason they are, at times, not in keeping with the material of the sentence and with the laws of logic.

#### THE USE OF *I* AND THE PASSIVE

Many students avoid the use of *I* because of a feeling that constant *I*'s give the appearance of egotism to a letter or a personal theme. Such egotism as there is in such a document is due to the fact that a writer is telling about himself, and that is not obviated by a shift from the first person to the third in a personal reminiscence or by a superficial change in wording such as is involved in a shift from the active to the passive voice. "That year was spent in study" is awkward and ugly; on the other hand, there is no egotism in writing "I spent that year in study," for when one is narrating an experience of one's own it is natural and proper to use *I* frequently. Autobiographies which speak of the writer in the third person and use the passive circumlocution are often far more egotistic in effect than those which use *I* and the active voice: their very lack of naturalness emphasizes

their egotism. Moreover, if an author is a great egotist, he will reveal the fact by what he writes about himself, no matter what superficial precautions he takes to disguise it.

Indeed, the active voice should always be preferred to the passive voice. Frequent use of the passive voice weakens one's style; the active voice is a more vigorous, powerful way of expressing action. In fact, the passive voice does not express action at all but merely the result of action, the conclusion of action. Moreover, it omits the actor altogether or puts him in subordinately as an incidental element (with a *by* phrase). Finally the passive is more awkward and less easy and natural than the active. "Shelley wrote *Alastor* under the oaks of Windsor Forest" is obviously a more natural and vigorous sentence than "*Alastor* was written by Shelley under the oaks of Windsor Forest." No doubt there are occasions when the passive expresses just the desired idea, and in such cases one should use it without hesitation. The objection is to the indiscriminating overuse of the passive.

#### VII. INFORMAL AND FORMAL PROSE

In less formal discourse, especially narrative, simple, familiar words are used. To get certain effects the writer may use colloquialisms, indicating his consciousness of the license by inclosing them in quotation marks. In reporting conversation, the writer must use colloquialisms, and even slang, if the people of whom he is writing naturally employ them. It is a strange fact, however, that

if a writer literally reports familiar conversation (whether it be of college students or of clerks in a store) with all the mistakes in grammar and all the slang that people actually use, he will produce an effect of greater vulgarity and ignorance than the people themselves would do. The reasons for this exaggeration in effect are probably that when we read we notice slang words and mistakes much more than we do when we hear them, because in the body of literature (even including newspapers and magazines) they are rarer than in talk; and that we have hardly any other means of judging characters in a story except by their speech. Consequently in writing conversation one must modify the actual speech that one hears, using a much smaller proportion of colloquialisms than would appear in actual talk.

In more formal prose one should strive for fluency and naturalness of tone. In the first place, with a little care one can avoid repeating the same words over and over again. Repetition of merely grammatical words like *I*, the other personal pronouns, *and*, *the*, and prepositions generally, is hardly noticeable. Frequent use of *but*, however, is clumsy because it means constant opposition or contrast of ideas, a relation that quickly becomes tiresome. Still more awkward is the repetition of striking words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Such overuse is likely to occur in any composition of considerable length because the writer tends to use one series of words which apply to his thought. Moreover, at any given time a person is likely to have in his subconscious mind only a restricted number of words with



which to express his ideas. Hence, if his conscious mind is intent on his thoughts, he is likely to use certain words many times as he talks or writes. As one rereads one's composition, one should notice whether such repetitions occur, and, if they do, substitute for some of them synonyms or near-synonyms which adequately express the ideas.

In books on rhetoric there is always a section or two on the necessity of increasing one's vocabulary; the average college student, however, has a large enough vocabulary: he can read almost any book and understand the meaning of every word in it. The trouble is that of the many words he knows he uses comparatively few. His task, then, is not so much to increase the number of words he knows as to put into active use the vocabulary he already possesses.

By "naturalness of tone" is meant the avoidance of ornate, elaborate, bookish words. If a writer uses such diction, his readers realize that he cares more for form and appearance than for the ideas or experiences which he is presenting. Besides being repelled by the elaboration of his expression, most readers will insensibly feel that if *he* does not care for his material, they need not care for it. Hence he loses any serious effect which he may intend. There was a time (in the eighteenth century) when almost all writers expressed themselves as indirectly and grandiosely as possible, avoiding simple words for rare or polysyllabic ones; but modern taste rejects such pretentiousness and prefers simplicity and directness. The use of orotund language is now largely

restricted to circus posters, some newspaper reporters, and the sort of politicians called "windbags."

*Exercise 1:* With the aid of section III write sentences illustrating the correct usage of the listed words. (Improper coinages like *enthuse* obviously will be omitted.)

*Exercise 2:* Rewrite the paragraph on pages 133-34 in effective English.

*Exercise 3:* Rewrite the following passage effectively. The student should feel free to add or alter details.

#### MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In the state of Virginia on an old southern plantation dwelled a woman whose famous ancestors went back before the Revolution and her husband of equally illustrious folks. To this worthy couple on December 5, 1914 a little baby boy was born to be the pride and joy of their lives, for it would seem that they had been wanting a little child for many long years. On this old southern plantation where very little that was crude or modern was ever heard the little child was raised. He was a charming little boy with golden curls, violet eyes, and attractive little ways; he had also a big imagination. Often to him the sky would open its azure portals and there could be seen God's throne surrounded by a vast amount of mist and vagueness. The trees over his head also always seemed to him very real and alive, like sentinels which guarded him from harm. Even the greensward under his feet he loved and still loves, for one's childhood memories are the very pleasantest memories of one's lifetime.

*Exercise 4:* Criticize explicitly the following review of the opera *Fedora*. Either rewrite it in effective prose or write an effective critical appreciation of a concert, opera, play, or cinema production which you have attended.

#### SEASON'S FIRST FEDORA

"I, with these my hands,  
Washed each dear corpse, arrayed  
you, poured  
Libations in rites of burial; and,  
in care  
For thee, thy body, Polyneikes,  
honoring, I  
Gain this recompense."

—ANTIGONE

Who, aware of their context, can read those lines without an aching throat? Within their brief compass is contained the sum of a stupendous woe. And yet how simple they are, how quiet! How empty of all sound and fury, and yet how eloquent!

That, under stress of great emotion, the soul falls silent, that the gestures of supreme tragedy are few, are circumstances too often disregarded by those who essay to record in words or music the sorrows of a *Fedora* or a *Loris*.

#### MUSIC TO HEAR AGAIN

It is likely, nevertheless, that, with a deepening perception upon the part of its composers, the dramatic music of the future will revert ever more constantly to something of that wondrous and supremely eloquent absence of mere sound which characterizes the score in which a Wagner elects to immortalize the sorrows of an *Isolde*; to something of that noble simplicity which makes of the stately progress of Sophoclean verse the loveliest music that ever ravished the ears of man.

Fortunately, however, one is not here required to write a learned critique upon the merits of the opera which Giordano, underscoring a Sardou text, has conferred upon a somewhat reluctant stage. It is sufficient merely to say that, so long as his *Fedora* is sung as Miss Easton and Mr. Martinelli sang it at Ravinia last night, it will continue to be sung and joyously to be heard.

Mr. Martinelli's *Loris* of this the first *Fedora* of the current season, proved, both dramatically and vocally, even more resplendent than his *Loris* of old, and Miss Easton sang what can in justice be termed no less than a superb performance.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DESCRIPTION

#### I. AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR FORMS OF DISCOURSE

When the student has developed the ability to write correctly and to compose short, informal articles, he is ready to study in detail the best methods of gaining the typical effects of successful writing. These he can learn by considering separately the four forms of composition. Rhetoricians have pointed out that these four types of writing may be grouped into two kinds, which correspond to two great functions of the human mind: (1) feeling, observing sensations; and (2) thinking, combining, and organizing what the senses bring to the mind and making judgments on it. The first includes description and narration; the second, exposition and argument. The first records experiences; the second deals with ideas and opinions.

#### II. WHY WE STUDY NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION

There is a widespread opinion that the study of description and narration has little or no practical value to the average student, because most people do not have occasion to write in those forms after they leave college. No idea could be more fallacious. Although it is true that few students will ever put into practice their knowl-

edge of description and narration by publishing fiction, yet all of them can and do make constant use of the results of such study, even though they are not conscious of the fact. In the letters which nowadays nearly everyone writes to friends, these forms predominate; and as good personal letters are a great means of binding one's friends to one's self, the ability to write effective personal letters is a valuable asset. Likewise, these forms comprise the main substance of our conversation. To be sure, we do talk about our ideas and opinions, but we talk far more about our experiences and about incidents and people we have seen. The study of effective methods of describing people and scenes and narrating incidents in writing should make the student realize how best to gain similar effects in speech, because the methods in both are essentially the same. Everyone has had the painful experience of listening to tedious, pointless narratives, which were failures because the speaker knew nothing about selection and arrangement of details or about climax; on the other hand, everyone knows how delightful a well-told anecdote can be. There is no need to dwell upon the harm which tiresome, flat talk does to the speaker by making him unattractive to potential friends or upon the social value of an ability to tell stories and to describe people and scenes effectively. Finally, the greatest means of getting interest in exposition or argument is incidental use of narrative and description in the development of illustrative examples. Some popular writers, in fact, make expository articles

almost entirely of anecdotes which suggest their points. Granted that only a solitary student here and there will develop into a magazine writer; still, many a student some time in his life will find that he must prepare an expository article or speech for a business or social group and that his knowledge of how to incorporate *effective* illustrative material in what he writes or says may spare him the humiliation of having his audience fall asleep before his very eyes. For such reasons as these it must be obvious that the study of narration and description is quite as "practical" for the ordinary student as for the future writer of fiction.

### III. WHAT IS MEANT BY "DESCRIPTION"

The terms *description* and *describe* are used in ordinary conversation in the loosest way. People speak of describing what happened and how a machine operates; but in the study of writing, one narrates what happened and explains how a machine operates. In the first case, the result is narration; in the second exposition. For the teacher and student of composition *describe* and *description* have a precise and limited meaning. To them description means an effort on the part of the writer or speaker to suggest a picture to the mind by the use of concrete material which appeals to the senses: i.e., description is an effort to suggest to the reader a *particular* scene, person, or object. Like painting, it deals with the specific and the concrete.

The ultimate purpose of description, however, is not merely to suggest a picture but to arouse a mood or feel-



ing in the reader. We describe a scene not only to make the reader see it but also to make him feel as we did when we saw the scene. We may have felt joy in the beauty of the woods, enthusiasm in the excitement of the crowd, or loathing at the dirt and smells in some slum. The same scene, moreover, affects different people in different ways. In looking at a person who is dead, for example, some of us are aware of the pathos of death; others of the serenity of death; still others of the horror and lonesomeness of death. Our ultimate purpose, as we write a description of such a scene, is to make the reader share our emotion, whatever it was when we viewed it. This statement does not mean that a description should contain a dissection of our emotions, for all such analysis is expository in effect. We should not tell the writer what we feel, but should convey our emotion through the medium of concrete details, selected and presented in such a way that the reader will imaginatively respond to them. In the case of the example cited above, if we wish to suggest our horror of death, we stress certain details of the scene before our eyes; if we desire the reader to feel its serenity, still other details.

Very often, indeed, only the purpose the writer has in view determines whether certain material will develop into description or exposition. A person who picks up a small devilfish on the seashore and "describes"<sup>1</sup> it as a devilfish, one of a species, is obviously doing in an untrained fashion what the zoölogist does scientifically,

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter quotation marks around *describes*, *description*, etc., indicate that the words are being used not in their precise meaning but in the loose fashion in which we employ them in common speech.

i.e., classifying the creature. Yet a devilfish does arouse emotion in some supersensitive people. Hence a true description of the fish would not enumerate the different biological aspects of it but would select and imaginatively present those details of a particular fish which call forth horror and repulsion. Likewise "descriptions" in guidebooks are not really descriptions in the rhetorical sense of the word but explanations. A guide on a sight-seeing automobile might "describe" the University of Chicago to the passengers in this fashion:

On the north side of the Midway stand the buildings which constitute the University of Chicago. They are Gothic in architecture and are made of Indiana limestone which has turned gray under the atmospheric conditions and smoke of Chicago. On the campus proper there are dormitories for men and women, scientific laboratories, a library, a modern language building, a law school, and various other academic buildings. The buildings are grouped into quadrangles, and the University plans to have in the center of each quadrangle trees, grass, and shrubs. Apart from the campus proper are the University clinics, the school of education, various divinity schools, the men's and women's gymnasiums, and the famous stadium. The University, great as it is at present, is only a fraction of what it will be fifty years from now.

Our guide, however, is not really describing but is explaining the physical layout of the University. The guide's words address the intellect; they do not make a picture which appeals to the senses and through them to the emotions.

#### IV. WHAT KINDS OF SUBJECTS ARE SUITABLE FOR DESCRIPTION

It follows from the preceding discussion that the student can use as potential material for description any *specific* scene, person, or object which affects him *emo-*

*tionally*. These two qualifications practically rule out subjects like "An Easter Bonnet," "A 19— Cadillac," "My Chinese Stamp Box," "My New Baby-Grand," "Mother's Custard Pies," "A Jonathan Apple," "A Ripe Watermelon," etc. In the first place, even if the student develops subjects such as "My New Baby-Grand," or "An Easter Bonnet" by the descriptive method, not explaining them but picturing them as particularized objects, emphasizing their individuality, the results will not touch the reader emotionally. In the second place, the student, in dealing with such subjects, often fails even to treat them descriptively and falls straightway into exposition. He thinks he is describing a Jonathan apple, his mother's custard pies, a 19— Cadillac, but what he really does is to give characteristics of all the Jonathan apples, custard pies, or 19— Cadillacs that he has ever known. Such generalizations are expository, for, as we know, description deals with the specific.

Some scenes, on the other hand, have such great emotional appeal that the student has not skill enough to make the reader feel it. The Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, the Jungfrau, and other extraordinary natural phenomena arouse in the spectator exultation akin to fear and humiliate him with the sense of his own insignificance. So awful indeed are such sights that only a genius can describe them. Similarly the impression produced by the great creations of man can be adequately recorded only by a gifted writer whose imagination is

enkindled by inspiration. The student had better leave descriptions of the Taj Mahal, the cathedral at Seville, the shrines at Nikko, York Cathedral, St. Peter's at Rome, and similar monuments to such a writer. If an ordinary man tries to describe St. Marks at Venice, the result is either a guidebook explanation of the edifice or an ineffective rhetorical flight. Yet Ruskin could so describe the cathedral that a tourist can read the famous passage on the spot and find that it not only adequately conveys the impression the edifice produces but even ennobles and enriches it. Unfortunately we are not Ruskins and so must be content to appreciate his bursts of eloquence rather than try to emulate them.

#### V. DESCRIPTION AND OBSERVATION

In order to make the reader share our feelings, we must make the description as vivid as possible. The means of making a description vivid are exact observation, selection of the essential details, and the use of suggestive words. In the first of these, observation, people differ greatly. Some observe so little of what they see that they do not notice the main features of buildings which they pass every day, that they cannot state the color of eyes or hair of absent friends; and so with the senses of hearing, touch, etc. Others unconsciously notice with an astonishing exactness all the sensations that come to them. Thus if the members of a class are asked one day to write what they observed on the way to school, a few will be able to record an extraordinary

range of sensations in detail. But more will be especially sensitive to one class of sensations, such as touch or hearing. As the mass of observations furnishes the source of material, it is obvious that the good observer is potentially a writer of effective description. On the other hand, one who does not naturally notice sensations will always find description a task. Probably if teachers could be in charge of students for a long enough time, they could develop the faculty of observation in those who do not have it naturally; but as there are many other subjects of study demanding attention, we must be satisfied to do what we can in a short period. Certainly (quite apart from its value in connection with description) observation enriches one's life, increases one's happiness; and hence it is worth developing as much as possible.

The means of developing observation are obvious. If the student cares to do so, he can invent exercises such as the following: Make a list of all the features you have observed about a person or scene. Then look at the person or scene again and note what errors and what omissions you have made. Observe the tones of particular friends' voices and the sound of their laughter; then try to identify them by these auditory evidences when you cannot see them. Similar devices to develop the senses of taste, smell and touch can easily be contrived.

#### VI. DESCRIPTION AND SELECTION OF DETAILS

Emphasis on observation, however, must not lead to the supposition that it is the only essential of good de-

scription. An accurate and fairly full list of all the sensations felt by an observer does not make an effective impression on the reader. Even if all the details observed in a given scene are well expressed, the result is not successful description. A photograph (or painting) appeals directly to the eye and can be seen as a whole at one glance; but a description appeals to the mind through words, and it can give only one sensory detail at a time. A long, detailed description requires the reader's mind to take in, one after another, many details, couched in words which must be translated by the mind into imagined sensations, to hold them all together and to synthesize them into a mental picture. It is practically impossible for the mind to do so; and even if it could, the work involved is so great that most minds shirk it. As a matter of fact, the mind can hold a few details and synthesize them into a picture without great effort, but it can hold only a few. This is the basis of the conviction which many young people have that they do not like to read description and of their practice of skipping over description in the books which they read. Their instinct is right; and probably more conscientious readers really do not get clear pictures out of the long descriptions which they "wade through." Therefore, descriptions to be successful must be brief. If a writer feels that completeness compels him to make descriptions long and detailed, he should reflect that by so doing he defeats his own aim because the reader does not get the full effect which he wishes. A person who actually



reads such a description forgets the first details before he reaches the end, and hence gets only an incomplete effect.

As completeness of effect is impossible it is best for the writer to determine the precise picture which the reader shall get by selecting a few significant details which will suggest it. He should look at description as an impressionistic, not a photographic, art. Indeed, herein lies the artistic justification of selection in description: true art is always selective. It aims not to reproduce actuality but to suggest impressions of actuality. The painter omits details which seem to him unimportant so as to suggest what is essential and to give his interpretation of person or scene. In the same way description is suggestive, not photographic. Recognizing the necessity of selection, therefore, the literary artist makes it his means of gaining effects. That is, he picks out just those details which will suggest the whole impression which he desires. Obviously, if a person's nose or complexion or mouth produces no particular effect on a beholder, there is no need to mention that feature; on the other hand, details of salient, characteristic features suggest the whole impression of the person vividly. In merely two or three sentences a gifted writer can often flash into the reader's mind a vivid picture.

. . . . The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin . . . .

—DICKENS, *A Christmas Carol*

The canal stretched out before me, dark, long and stiff, like a hard stiff bar; it gleamed smooth and glassy in the drizzling rain. The thick clay banks shone; they, too, looked grey and hard, and the row of trees down one side, cold and aloof. It was very wet.

In fact, as these illustrations show, the writer's task is much like the cartoonist's: he must select the outstanding features and emphasize them. In determining, moreover, what details are worth giving, a writer always has memory as a guide. That is, if, when thinking of a person, one remembers the piercing look of his eyes, his shaggy eyebrows, his square chin, one should use those details in describing him. Similarly with scenes, it is the sensations which one remembers (granting that one is a good observer and remembers well) that one should give.

Among the details which are selected, some should be from one or more of the senses in addition to sight. The basic reason for this rule is the fact that each of the arts has its special field: painting deals primarily with line and color; sculpture deals with contours (in early times it used color also, but now it generally does not); description, with the whole range of sensations. In its own field each art is supreme. Thus, if one wishes to suggest lines and colors (sight-sensations only), one should paint, because painting suggests a scene in those terms far more vividly than any other art can. A painting of a scene presents a more definite picture to the eye and more beautiful sight effects (lines, light and shade, colors) than description can. Perhaps the keenest realization of the difference between the two arts comes

when one reads about a painting. In a book on art, the best description of a painting, done with great care, will not convey a clear mental picture of it; our fathers and mothers who read such a book before the advent of illustrated editions had practically no visual images of the pictures discussed. One art does not intrude upon the other, and although description has much in common with painting, since it is largely visual in appeal, it cannot take the place of the latter. Yet, in spite of its limitations, description has certain advantages over painting and over all the other arts, in that it is not limited to the visual sense or to any single sense in its appeal but addresses all the senses, making use of all kinds of sensations to create an impression of a certain scene or person. Our great writers of prose and poetry have realized its power and have fully utilized its wide range of sensory appeal. Coleridge, for example, pictures the still wonder of a cold, moonlit night largely by appealing to our auditory sense

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
 .....  
 .....whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
 Or if the secret ministry of frost  
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
 Quietly shining to the quiet moon.

—*Frost at Midnight*

In a similar fashion the student, if he wishes to write the most effective kind of description, must not restrict himself to sight-sensations alone but must suggest also sounds, smells, tastes, motion, and touch-sensations.

Besides having a wider sensory appeal, description is superior to painting in still another way: it can deal with subjects which painting cannot adequately handle. The dragon of the first book of *The Faery Queene* is more horribly like the imaginings of our fairy-tale days than any we have seen in painting. And so with other mythological and supernatural creatures—painting is too tangible, too definite, too limited to picture the unknown, for it leaves nothing to our imaginations. But description, rich in its power of suggestion, can imprison in words unearthly creatures and make them the awful realities of our dreams. Again, apocalyptic scenes—heaven and hell and the misty land of the Brushwood Boy—are more satisfactorily described by a Milton or a Kipling than painted by a Fra Angelico or a Maxfield Parrish. Other spectacles which we judge not sublime but horrible are also debarred from painting. Rembrandt's "Lesson in Anatomy," in spite of the fact that it is a remarkable solution of various problems of a technical nature, will never appeal to the average lover of pictures and will always repel many of us. Yet such a scene can be described without disgusting even the most squeamish readers. The more grewsome aspects can be softened down or left out, or, if presented, they can be made to appeal rather to our scientific interest than to our senses.

#### VII. DESCRIPTION AND SUGGESTIVE WORDS

Since in description, one expresses one's self through the medium of words, one should choose them with as

great care as the artist does his colors. Great painters even today often grind and mix their own colors rather than rely upon commercial products, for they realize that the very life of a painting depends upon the paints they use. The writer of a good description exercises no less care. In choosing his words, a student should keep in mind the teachings in chapter vii concerning effective words. He must avoid wordiness and strive for simplicity and compression. Particularly in description, the beginner will make the mistake of piling up adverbs, adjectives, and phrases of all kinds, forgetting that vigorous nouns and verbs should be his mainstay. What adjectives, adverbs, and phrases he does employ should be specific, concrete, and sensory in appeal. He should not evaluate a scene by calling it *impressive*, *beautiful*, or *sad*; he should make the reader feel it is so by suggesting its appearance.

Since description aims to make a picture by the use of concrete details which appeal to the senses, the success of a description will depend largely upon whether or not the words used have a vivid sensory appeal. We have five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. There are practically an unlimited number of words which appeal to the visual sense; many which address the auditory sense; and some which call forth tactual response. The words to designate smell and taste, however, are few in number and, as may be seen from the following list, are for the most part applicable to both senses. In the case of these two senses we are forced to

let the object tasted or smelled suggest the sensation or, if the object is unknown, to fall back upon comparison ("a smell like that of sandalwood"). Most attempts to describe odor or taste result in an analysis of it rather than a reproduction of the sensation itself.

Sight: white, black, red, pale, dull, bright, gloomy, murky, shining, gleaming, glimmering, low, topmost, long; rolling, swelling, quick, palsied, quivering, small, large, measureless, fat, thin, flat, round, hollow, transparent, translucent.

Sound: low, soft, loud, harsh, still, silent, quiet, hushed, raucous, strident, hissing, echoing, panting, crunching, muttering, humming, roaring.

Touch: chilly, frosty, cold, hot, damp, wet, moist, jagged, prickly, smooth, rough.

Smell and Taste: sour, salt, bitter, sweet, rancid, putrid, acrid, pungent.

*Exercise:* Write ten sentences using verbs which suggest the effect expressed by ten of the preceding adjectives. (Example: His face *shone* like anointed glass.) Make these sentences fresh and vivid in sensory appeal.

#### VIII. THE NECESSITY OF A POINT OF VIEW

In the actual writing of a description, attention must be paid to two things: the point of view and the arrangement. The former phrase has been so extensively and loosely used, often as a synonym of idea or opinion, that it requires exact definition. Primarily point of view is the physical position from which an observer views a scene or a writer describes it. In actual life we do not see scenes from several points of view at once; we cannot see all the sides of a house at once. Because of our constant experience of viewing scenes from one position at a time, our minds are unable to imagine a scene de-



scribed from more than one point of view. We can no more form a mental picture of a street scene from the top of a building and from the bottom of it at one moment than we can have such an experience in life. Hence a writer must describe a view of any sort from only one point of view at a time. He can describe the same object or scene several times, of course, in succeeding descriptions from differing points of view, just as a painter can paint several pictures of the same scene from different points; but he cannot describe it from several points of view at the same time, any more than a painter can paint a single picture in such a way. Yet, because we have analogous experience in life, it is possible to describe something from a moving point of view. If the writer makes it clear that he is describing from a car window, or an elevator, or an aeroplane, or any other moving object in which a person can ride, he may try to suggest his sensations from such a shifting point of view. Such a description, like one from a fixed point of view, will "hitch up" with the reader's experience; and if details in it are well selected and well expressed, the effect will be successful.

Perhaps it is desirable to point out some ways in which the point of view in a description is improperly altered and confused. Generally the fault comes from an author's starting to describe a scene from one point of view, and then in order to inform the reader of something which seems necessary to his general purpose, including a small detail or two which could not be seen

(or heard) from that point of view. Or, the writer may start to describe a scene in spring time and then forgetfully introduce details which could be true only in another season. Herein comes a pitfall for those who are inventing a scene (say in fiction): if they do not have either extremely good sensory memories or strong critical powers, they are likely to include quite impossible combinations of physical phenomena, e.g., to represent birds of a species that sing only in spring as singing in autumn or plants blooming together which flower in different seasons. To avoid unfavorable comment and even ridicule, a writer must exercise great care in such matters.

In some cases it is best for the writer to state his point of view explicitly in his first sentences, but in general he need not do so. If he keeps to it, the reader will get his picture without explicit statement.

A secondary meaning of point of view is mental attitude. As we have noticed above, the essential purpose of a description is to suggest the mood or feeling which the thing described has aroused in the writer. This is the writer's mental or emotional point of view. Obviously it must be consistent with itself: that is, if the writer begins with one mental attitude toward his subject he should not shift to another which is inconsistent with the first, because if he does so he cannot get the definite effect which is his reason for describing a scene. He must know his own mind and consistently keep to one attitude toward his subject. Furthermore,

he *must actually have* a mental point of view, for if he describes a scene without having a definite emotional attitude toward it, the result seems pointless, purposeless, and without motive or meaning. The attitude may be a subtle, intangible feeling, but it should be definite enough to give meaning to the whole. In some cases the writer may state his mental attitude explicitly, but as general rule it is far better to suggest it by means of the details chosen and the tone of the style (e.g., its enthusiasm, its scorn, etc.).

*Exercise:* State what is the point of view in each of the following themes; criticize it in each case.

#### BROOKLYN BRIDGE

At twilight Brooklyn Bridge hangs like a gray mirage against the sky. The central support towers up, more imposing in its massiveness than the watch towers of the Bastille. At its midpoint, there rests the span of the bridge itself. This is the sun-lit course upon which two streams of men, automobiles, drays, trolley cars, and cabs pass each other. High in the support and descending to the span are two Gothic archways which divide the traffic. Upon each way the vehicles and passers-by constantly surge in diametric directions. Hundreds of twisted steel cables, extending from the high points of the tower to each shore line appear as silken threads ready for winding. Ferry boats, tugs, yachts and barges pass like shadows beneath the bridge and with raucous whistles salute me who stand upon it. Daylight fades wholly; a fog creeps in and partly veils the bridge. The round eyes of the street lights gleam out, each with its own faint halo. I am reminded of the favorite phantasmagoria slide of my childhood—London bridge, alight at dusk, with a clouded moon shining down upon it.

#### THE JUGGLER

He stood there alone in the great hall. In a long, straight green robe, he looked like a quiet tree-trunk with a red dragon crawling up his back. Only his arm flashed in and out, up and down, and his wide Japanese sleeves flapped. Red and yellow balls flew about in

the air like live objects which he controlled. Suddenly he gathered them up and took out a roll of white ribbon. He threw it out, whipped it back and forth—white outline waves made by a genie.

#### IX. WHAT IS MEANT BY "ARRANGEMENT"

As to arrangement—it is impossible to lay down specific rules, but naturally the details should follow some order. General features, a main outline of the scene, may come first and then details; or one may give details nearest to the point of view first and gradually work back to the remote distance; or vice versa. One may follow a sort of psychological order and give first the details that an observer would notice first, then those he would notice next, etc. In revising a description, one might well test out two or three possible arrangements until one has found the best.

*Exercise:* Criticize the arrangement of details in the following description.

#### LOOKING SOUTH FROM THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

The wide silvery strand of the Potomac glides, in graceful sweeps, to the left toward the sea, studded here and there with white dots made by motorboats. Along the near bank grow Japanese cherry trees, a colorful pink against the blue water. Across the river, hills rise slowly backward from the edge. Through the trees on the near bank one catches glimpses of white stones, markers of graves in the Arlington National Cemetery. Beyond them hills appear partly obscured by a thin blue haze.

#### X. PURE DESCRIPTION IS AN ARTIFICIAL FORM

In published writing, pure description is practically never found. Writers of fiction incorporate descriptive details in presenting action and conversation or combine

such details with exposition in suggesting character and background. In non-fiction, personal reminiscences, and books on travel, description is employed in a similar manner. In argument and exposition, one finds description usually combined with narration in the citation of an incident or the depiction of a scene which the writer has introduced as a proof or as an example of a statement. In fact, pure description is the creation of composition teachers who believe that to study properly its technique, the student must consider it segregated from the other forms of writing and focus for the time being his attention upon it alone. The essential reason for the rhetorician's emphasis on description is that good descriptive inserts in exposition, argument, and narration will make a dead piece of prose come alive. The very vitality of the student's style depends to a great degree upon his mastery of pure description.

*Exercise 1:* In the following selection distinguish what is exposition (i.e., analysis of character) and what is pure description.

#### THE WORKHOUSE

Right in front of [Mr. Barton]—probably because he was stone-deaf, and it was deemed more edifying to hear nothing at a short distance than at a long one—sat “Old Maxum,” as he was familiarly called, his real patronymic remaining a mystery to most persons. A fine philological sense discerns in this cognomen an indication that the pauper patriarch had once been considered pithy and sententious in his speech; but now the weight of ninety-five years lay heavy on his tongue as well as on his ears, and he sat before the clergyman with protruded chin, and munching mouth, and eyes that seemed to look at emptiness.

Next to him sat Poll Fodge,—known to the magistracy of her county as Mary Higgins,—a one-eyed woman, with a scarred and

seamy face, the most notorious rebel in the workhouse, said to have once thrown her broth over the master's coat-tails, and who, in spite of nature's apparent safeguards against that contingency, had contributed to the perpetuation of the Fodge characteristics in the person of a small boy, who was behaving naughtily on one of the back benches. Miss Fodge fixed her one sore eye on Mr. Barton with a sort of hardy defiance.

Beyond this member of the softer sex, at the end of the bench, sat "Silly Jim," a young man afflicted with hydrocephalus, who rolled his head from side to side, and gazed at the point of his nose. These were the supporters of Old Maxum on his right.

On his left sat Mr. Fitchett, a tall fellow, who had once been a footman in the Oldinport family, and in that giddy elevation had enunciated a contemptuous opinion of boiled beef which had been traditionally handed down in Shepperton as the direct cause of his ultimate reduction to pauper commons. His calves were now shrunken, and his hair was gray without the aid of powder; but he still carried his chin as if he were conscious of a stiff cravat; he set his dilapidated hat on with a knowing inclination towards the left ear; and when he was on field-work he carted and uncarted the manure with a sort of flunky grace, the ghost of that jaunty demeanour with which he used to usher in my lady's morning visitors. The flunky nature was nowhere completely subdued but in his stomach, and he still divided society into gentry, gentry's flunkies, and the people who provided for them. A clergyman without a flunky was an anomaly, belonging to neither of these classes. Mr. Fitchett had an irrepressible tendency to drowsiness under spiritual instruction, and in the recurrent regularity with which he dozed off, until he nodded and awaked himself, he looked not unlike a piece of mechanism ingeniously contrived for measuring the length of Mr. Barton's discourse.

Perfectly wide-awake, on the contrary, was his left-hand neighbour, Mrs. Brick, one of those hard undying old women, to whom age seems to have given a network of wrinkles, as a coat of magic armour against the attacks of winters, warm or cold. The point on which Mrs. Brick was still sensitive—the theme on which you might excite her hope and fear—was snuff. It seemed to be an embalming powder, helping her soul to do the office of salt.

And now, eke out an audience of which this front benchful was a sample, with a certain number of refractory children, over whom



Mr. Spratt, the master of the workhouse, exercised an irate surveillance, and I think you will admit that the university-taught clergyman, whose office it is to bring home the gospel to a handful of such souls, has a sufficiently hard task.—GEORGE ELIOT, *Amos Barton*.

*Exercise 2:* Criticize the following descriptions.

#### A CIGARETTE

Here is a cigarette of the far-famed Lucky Strike brand as the gold trade mark indicates. It is smooth and compact, like a slender stick of chalk. Inside of its banded paper shell is a finely-threaded bundle of blended tobacco, the taste of which has not the bitterness and dryness of most tobacco; it is rich and sweet in a manner indicating that the tobacco has been treated by some flavoring process in its manufacture. This sweetness, however, is neither the flat, sickish aroma of pure Turkish leaf, nor the musk of the Virginia plant. Nor is it the artificial flavor of a chemically prepared tobacco similar to the popular plug chew. When you draw in a puff of Lucky Strike, and hear the faint crackling of the dry shreds, you can prepare to enjoy the full flavor of a mixture of pure tobaccos, to experience the complete natural flavor of tobaccos which are toasted before being rolled into cigarettes.

#### THE PATRIARCH

The old Gymnasium stood a little apart from the other buildings with its gray stone walls in marked contrast to the red brick structures which flanked it on either side. It occupied the highest point in the campus and with its several stories topped off by pinnacles and turrets, it towered above its low-roofed neighbors like a patriarch among his tribe. The reflection of the morning sunlight formed an aureole about the highest turret, which rose like a hoary head above gray-robed shoulders. The somber coloring was broken by a golden pattern of delicate tracery where occasional flecks of sunlight filtered through the foliage of a magnificent elm. About halfway down on the gray robes began faint etchings of grayish brown embroidery. This was outlined by twinings of dead ivy whose little clinging tendrils made separate stitches beside the solid stems. Gradually the gray-brown pattern was interspersed with green leaves. Their numbers increased toward the bottom until the sober robes were overlaid with a solid green border of elaborate design but perfect

workmanship. A clump of old-fashioned flowers growing at the base of the structure became gay rosettes, which bedecked green sandals. And thus the patriarch stood, richly gowned but dignified and venerable.

*Exercise 3:* Rewrite "The Patriarch," the preceding theme.

*Exercise 4:* Write a description of the college campus. Using some of the same details, write an expository theme bearing the title of the college to which you belong: "Oberlin College," "The University of Pennsylvania," etc.

*Exercise 5:* Write description (not more than 200 words) according to the following assignments.

1. An inanimate object at rest, in terms of sight sensations, suggesting color, light and shade, form and dimension.

2. An inanimate object at rest, in terms of sound, touch, taste, and odor.

3. Inanimate object, in terms of the effect upon the observer.

4. A person not in motion.

5. A person in motion.

6. A room so described as to suggest the character of its occupant.

7. Describe a scene, using as wide a range of suggestion as you can.

8. After having done the others, write a description of anything you please, making it as vivid as possible.

N.B.: In planning each of these descriptions, the student should remember the definition of description contained in this chapter. He should have in mind a single mood or emotional effect in writing each description. After having written a first draft, he should look over the description, striking out every detail and every word that does not add to the picture and contribute to the mood. In description best efforts are gained by (1) selection of only those details necessary to the effect and (2) choice of the most suggestive words.

## XI. EXAMPLES OF DESCRIPTION

### IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Around the low cabin a sea-sick fence tottered. The latchless gate squeaked under the pressure of my hand and opened upon a collection of cart wheels, hoes, spades, a chicken coop minus any sign of feathered life, broken wooden boxes, and a few logs, half-hewn. Behind this trash sat a woman, whose knotted hand clutched a corn-cob pipe, held between thinly pursed lips. Her dress of flam-

ing cotton heightened the color of her sunburnt face, over which straggled wisps of hair as black as the pieces of coal at her feet. Not by one motion did she betray any interest or even knowledge of my presence.

"Do you happen to know," I asked, "the way to the meeting house?"

With piercing grey eyes she scrutinized me as though I were an object a mile away. "I cain't see no meetin' house, cain you?" she drawled and resumed her pipe.

#### SPRING

Laden with apple blossoms, she dragged herself down the road. Her fat legs felt tired and mechanical like those of a toy doll that needed winding. She tried to avoid the hard stones, for the sandy road was rough, and her bare feet ached. Her red arms burned in the sun. Finally as though completely run down, she stood very still. A bird whistled just two notes, and then nothing broke the silence. She pulled at the flowers, giggled somewhat self-consciously, and again began picking her way over the sandy road.

#### GINGERBREAD ROW

If you will walk long enough and far enough and if you will turn often enough, you will some time come to Gingerbread Row. To be sure there are no Gingerbread Men on it; yet you will know it, for their houses are there waiting. They are all brown like the Men: some have pink frosting about the windows, roofs, and porches; some, blue frosting and some, yellow. Moreover they are all made exactly alike, except for the design of the frosting where the roof joins the front wall. Here there are scrolls, or hunting scenes, or urns, standing up stiffly or bouncing about at absurd angles. On the most beautiful frieze of all, pink and green mice chase each other across the boards. You will wonder who built the homes and whether the builder baked the Men, too, but you will never know, for you will never find Gingerbread Row again.

#### A MIDSUMMER TRAMP

Six people came down the hill, cringing away from the hot sun. At the foot of the hill, the air quivered, as though the hot gravel road were boiling and shaking. One man stopped, looked at the swamp with its many musk-rat huts, picked up a handful of stones

and threw them one by one at the huts. The others moved on with bent heads: they did not see the green fields, or the blue swamp with the red-winged blackbird perched on one of the rat huts. They were not even conscious of the seething yellow road winding up the hill ahead of them or of the hot, stinging wind. They only walked on.

#### THE SKYSCRAPER

At first he reminded me of a giraffe, meek and awkwardly dignified, with shoulders sloping into neck unending. But from the day I first thought of him as the human skyscraper other comparisons seemed inept. He looms; upward his lines go with the thrust of Gothic; long trunk rises from longer legs, and then the set-backs begin: shoulders narrow up to the top of the seams; above that, an incredibly high white collar; higher still, that absurd column of the man's neck. His face is insignificant—perhaps decorative detail would be superfluous at such a height.

#### DEMOCRACY

The air in the elevated train is hot, stuffy, and dingy-smelling. Two long rows of people face each other across the aisle, most of whom, not wishing to stare at their neighbors across the way, gaze into space or study the floor at their feet or the advertisements above the windows. A few fortunate persons, who are traveling in pairs, engage in conversation. Among the half-hundred passengers are represented all classes, all nationalities, a dozen degrees of wealth, a dozen grades of education. Here is a man in a derby hat, shell-rimmed spectacles, and a stiff collar two sizes too large for him, and here a professional looking man clutches fondly a half-smoked cigar. Over there is a woman laden with bundles, and across from her another, laden with children. One of the children sucks a lollypop with audible enjoyment. Down the aisle a laboring man is crowded between a dowager duchess and a late model of the younger married set. At my very elbow a youth is absorbed in the *Triple-X Magazine*. Overhead the livid, idiotic faces of the advertisements leer down on us. The stale air grows staler; the wheels clatter over the rails; the guard cries, "Granavenoo! G-r-a-n-a-v-e-n-o-o; Franklin Street!"

## CHAPTER IX

### NARRATION

#### I. WHY WE READ NARRATION

We think we read or listen to a story chiefly because of its plot, but since there are comparatively few plots in the world (all of which we probably knew by the time we had finished the grades), obviously we must be mistaken. Truth to tell, we always have some curiosity as to how the story which we are reading will turn out; yet on examination we shall find that we first became interested in it for other reasons. Successful narration, oral or written, appeals to us in more ways than one: to our interest in ideas, character, setting, humor. Anecdotes, for example (the most common form of narration without plot), arouse the first or last of these interests. In the course of talk on some problem of general consideration (the trustworthiness of Alsatian dogs, the benefits of prohibition, the evils of the "boss" in politics) we are accustomed to narrating incidents which we have observed in proof of our ideas. As for the "funny story," it is too commonly used to need discussion. More involved and highly developed narratives which employ plot likewise excite our sense of humor, awaken our curiosity because of the idea presented, or appeal to any of the other numerous interests which we have as human beings in human life.

When we say, therefore, that we do not enjoy the works of a certain author, we mean either that he does not present those phases of human existence which interest us or that his presentation of things with which we are emotionally and intellectually concerned seems unreal and superficial. The reader who accepts Gene Stratton Porter's or Myrtle Reed's novels as true pictures of life, who responds imaginatively to such an interpretation of it, will find George Meredith and Thomas Hardy dull and tiresome. On the other hand, an ardent admirer of the sophisticated and suave George Meredith may be disgusted by Dostoievsky's *Idiot* or Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, for (so he will tell you) he sees little use in reading about insane and criminal "cases"; he desires normal, healthy beings in his books. Yet a physician will surely find *The Idiot* fascinating as the autobiography of an epileptic, and a lawyer will see in *Thérèse Raquin* proof that law lost in Zola a great criminologist. In short, we become interested in an author's plot for many reasons: because of his humorous interpretation of life, his analysis of the human heart and mind, his exotic or picturesque background, or—most important of all—because of the characters he creates who arouse our sympathy so that we must follow their story to see "what happens to them."

*Exercise:* Read three short stories of Kipling, Conrad, W. Somerset Maugham, Joseph Hergesheimer, Edith Wharton, or Sarah Orne Jewett, and point out the appeals to interest which appear in them, omitting that of plot. If these authors are not available, have recourse to a good current magazine (*Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, etc.)



## II. THE NECESSITY OF PLOT

In any but the simplest anecdote or personal reminiscence, however, there is usually a plot which serves to knit the material together and which gives structure to the story. The reader of stories like Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* or Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* may find the plot so enthralling that he cannot put the story aside until he has finished it. On the other hand, the reader may find little interest in the plot and may carry away with him only the memory of a character or two or of the poignancy of some social injustice; but still the plot is the means by which the writer is able to put before his reader his characters or ideas.

To be sure, within recent years there has come on to the stage a form of static drama in which the dramatist presents without plot a "slice of life," a day or series of days in human life; Chekov's *Cherry Orchard* and Gorky's *Lower Depths* are famous examples. This plotless kind of narrative also may be found in the novel and the short story. English authors, for example, even today, have not wholly understood what the Americans call the "short story"; consequently a collection of Katherine Mansfield's stories seems to one accustomed to the American variety artistic but purposeless. This kind of plotless short story offers little, if any, training to the student of average ability; and so composition teachers of elementary courses customarily instruct students to make use of plot, even in personal narratives. They have found by experience that such topics as "The Student's

First Day in School," "The Student's First Experiences as a Teacher," "The Student's First Appearance on the Concert Platform," can best be developed if he makes some use of plot: if he attempts to arouse curiosity (suspense), to build the incidents of the episode up to a climax, to employ a speedy and effective resolution.

*Exercise:* There is no doubt that the average playgoer in America and England prefers a drama with plot to one without plot. Do you account for this preference wholly on the grounds of custom, or is there some other reason for it?

### III. WHAT CONSTITUTES PLOT

A plot is a struggle between two or more forces with one of which the reader is expected to sympathize. These forces may be different people, different groups of people, or merely tendencies inside the mind of one person. The ordinary plot found in plays or "movies" shows a "hero" or "heroine" (with whom the observer is supposed to sympathize) involved in struggle with a "villain." In more subtle narratives, such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *Markheim*, the struggle is inside the chief character's mind. In either case, the two forces are so evenly balanced that the reader cannot be sure which will win; hence, sympathizing as he does with one force, he feels anxiety as to the outcome—suspense. This feeling is maintained up to a point when some decisive change occurs in favor of one party (in the case of comedy, the one with which the reader sympathizes; in the case of tragedy, the one with which the reader does not sympathize). This point is known as the "climax." After

this point the writer concludes his story more or less rapidly—this last part is called the “resolution.” If it is prolonged, it is frequently referred to as an “anticlimax,” and is a fault, because once the reader knows the solution he feels no more interest in the story.

The foregoing statement outlines plot in the simplest terms. Any individual story may be complicated and involved, with more than one struggle and hence more than one suspense and climax. Thus in many novels and plays there are two or more plots: e.g., *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Silas Marner*. Moreover, even with one plot, there may be two suspenses and two climaxes. The best example of this latter kind of plot is that offered by the average detective story, in which the problem is presented at the opening of the narrative to the detective and, of course, also to the reader. The problem (who murdered the man or who stole the money) furnishes the reader with his first suspense. This the detective solves after a long series of struggles against obstacles created by the criminal or by circumstances. His solution is the first climax. But the reader has a secondary curiosity amounting to suspense: how did the detective work out the case in his own mind? This question the author usually does not answer till after the criminal has been brought to justice; that done, he makes the detective reveal his mental processes in solving the case. Often the explanatory part of the story is a long discussion which reaches its climax when the detective makes known his decision as to the crimi-

nal; the resolution is the means he employed in capturing the criminal. If the reader did not feel the secondary curiosity amounting to a secondary suspense, the long explanation after the main climax would be an anticlimax, a tiresome bit of bad construction.

#### IV. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL- CONSTRUCTED PLOT

In short stories and in one-act plays, which are the most ambitious forms of narrative that the student is likely to attempt, the plot is usually simple, not more involved at least than the detective story. This simple plot, then, is the framework which binds together narrative materials and makes a unit of them. In the building of the framework the student must bear in mind certain things. In the first place, he should manage his plot in such a way that the reader is in real suspense as to the outcome and yet, when he learns what it is, feels that it is a logical and probable result of the preceding action. Moreover, coincidence should not play an important part in bringing about the resolution. In the old melodrama the hero often turned up just in time to bring a happy conclusion, or he chanced at a crucial moment to overhear a bit of intrigue and so was able to baffle the villain. The plots of those old plays (as of the lower-class melodramatic "movies" now) were bad just because the authors let chance, improbable coincidence, help them in solving their complications. Not infrequently also they brought about a happy ending by hav-

ing the cruel, selfish father suddenly change character and welcome his son's humble young wife to his arms. Such inconsistency in treatment of character spoils the plot for an intelligent reader or observer. He knows that people in life generally do not change in such a handy fashion, and hence he feels that the play is not "true to life."

To put this matter positively: At the beginning of his story (or play) the writer presents a certain situation, in which two or more forces are at war, and certain people, who are characterized definitely. From that point on, the story should progress logically; everything which happens (up to and including the climax) should be the natural and probable result of what has gone before and of the characters involved. Any well-planned play, novel, or short story will exemplify that doctrine. Previous to the beginning of the story extraordinary coincidences may have happened (as in the Greek tragedy of *Edipus*, where, before the play opened, the chief character killed his father and married his mother); but once the action of the narrative has started, improbable coincidence is not permitted, and the people must act as persons of their character probably would in the given circumstances. Then, as new situations arise, they act similarly, etc., each situation leading on to another and finally to the climax.

If the plot is not very distinct, nor the opposite forces definite and obvious, the writer may need to "prepare" for what is to follow, by hints. Thus in one of

his stories Jack London begins with a long description of a scene and a detailed account of the actions of a prospector, who finally comes to the conclusion that he has found a rich lead. Through these early pages where no plot has been revealed, the author scatters hints which the reader notices: a suggestion comes to the miner that perhaps some other searchers may come, but in his interest in his investigations he dismisses the idea from his mind; he notes a faint hint of smoke at a distance but pays no attention to it. But these hints the reader remembers, and, when he comes to that part of the story in which another man appears and unexpectedly attacks the miner, he realizes that he has felt suspense for some time and that the event is the logical and probable result of what has gone before.

*Exercise 1:* Read three stories in good modern magazines (*Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Atlantic Monthly*), and analyze the plots, considering in the process the following questions: What are the conflicting forces? What is the climax? Is the resolution well managed? Is the plot logical and probable?

*Exercise 2:* We all know that coincidences happen in real life. Why are they not convincing when used in fiction?

*Exercise 3:* Stories like *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Brushwood Boy*, *The Water Babies*, and *Rip van Winkle* contradict actual experience. Why then do such stories seem "true to life"?

#### V. WHAT IS MEANT BY "ORIGINALITY IN PLOT"

The development of the plot is really all that can pretend to originality in the writer's work, for the plot itself can hardly be new. As there are but a few plots in existence (different authorities have counted as few as fifteen or as many as thirty-seven), it is only the



characterization of the people, the description of scenes, and other parts of the development that makes the story fresh and interesting to us. Any keen-witted observer of the "movies" must have realized this fact, for he knows that he has seen the same plots over and over, and that only the details in the characterization and settings make the old plots seem even temporarily different. Skilful playwrights and novelists can, and do, make the story of Cinderella in varied forms gripping and interesting.

A corollary of the preceding point is the fact that one need not worry about originality of plot. If one wishes to suggest the life of a given locality, develop a character, or present an idea in fictional form, one needs merely consider which one of the standard plots that come to mind will serve the particular purpose best. One can even take a particular story's plot and idea and, by transposing it into a new background and giving new characterization to it, produce a work which few would think of connecting with its original (e.g., transpose the plot of Maupassant's *A Piece of String* to an American negro community). Sometimes a writer acknowledges by his title or by some explicit statement in his story his indebtedness to the original (e.g., Turgenieff's *A Lear of the Steppe*). Of course much fresh incident must be devised, and the whole work requires real originality. Thus stories dealing with the finding of treasure generally use the same plot but have so much realistic incident, description, and characterization that they

hold suspense and seem quite new. In a similar fashion all love stories are essentially the same, with merely varying obstacles placed for the hero to surmount.

#### VI. WHY A PLOT IS DEVELOPED DRAMATICALLY

In presenting his material to the reader, the successful writer uses means similar to those of the dramatist. He does not merely summarize the plot and characterization but presents everything as directly as possible to the reader's mind. To do so, he plans out his material in scenes (just as if he were writing a play), and he develops them by description of people and of backgrounds and by conversation. Description presents the scene directly to the reader's mind as if he were looking at it: he visualizes the setting or background and the people who are there. By the conversation, in which the speeches are in keeping with the characters of the different people, he gets an impression of reality, and he forms his own judgment of them. By what the persons of the story say, decide upon, and do, the reader can watch the action unroll itself as he can watch happenings in the life about him. Without description, the reader could not imagine the background or the appearance of the people (and people are not real to us unless they have bodies, faces, voices, mannerisms of gesture and movement); without the conversation and definite action in the scenes, he would have no feeling of *reality* in the story: he would be reading a summary of action, a thing which has no life or vividness.

VII. THE USE OF BACKGROUND IN  
THE NARRATIVE

Concerning the presentation of background or setting we need say little here, because the methods writers use are those already discussed in the chapter on description. Every good narrative, however, has a setting—a fact a student often forgets in writing a story. He will locate a narrative in lower New York and give no suggestion as to the city's appearance so that the reader may visualize it; he will develop a scene in a room and tell the reader nothing more about the setting than that it is a room; he will place the hero or heroine on the concert stage, facing an audience for the first time, and leave the reader wholly unaware how the multitude appeared to the aspiring young artist. Not only is background a necessary accessory to plot and to characterization, but at times the latter are so much part of their setting that, deprived of it, they would have little reality. Dickens' characters belong in Dickens' London; the immoderate passions of the people in *Wuthering Heights* are in keeping with the storm-swept manor house and the wild, lonesome moors; Thomas Hardy's peasants are a rooted part of the very soil of Wessex; or, to come nearer home, Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt is an outgrowth of American cities. In other words, the characters of a story often seem real to the reader because he understands them as the products of their environment. An effective writer of narrative is aware of this fact and

makes use of it as W. Somerset Maugham does in his short story *Rain*. By his choice of title for this story, the author shows that he realized that one of the forces which brought about the tragedy at Pango Pango was an incessant and steady rain. If the student has never noticed how important background is to narrative, let him read at random short stories in a good modern magazine and analyze their effect. He will find that the plot is often trite and that its sole claim to freshness lies in the fact that the characters move against a vivid and new setting.

#### VIII. THE TWO METHODS OF CHARACTERIZATION

Two main methods of characterization are employed by writers of narrative: the dramatic and the expository. The first comprises description of the physical appearance of the character, including his mannerisms of speech and of action, report of his talk, and narration of his actions. The second means direct explanation, analysis of the person's characteristics, his faults, and his virtues. Certainly the first method is preferable. In the first place, its dramatic, concrete presentation is more interesting than analysis. But more important is the fact that this is the method of life: we learn the characters of people by observing their appearance, their actions, mannerisms, and talk. We never see inside them and thus learn their actual qualities; we can but form judgments of them according as their words

and actions impress us. Consequently people differ in their estimate of acquaintances: one admires a person whom another detests. Obviously as we learn and disagree about people in real life in this direct way, we feel characters in fiction to be actual people if we get our knowledge of them similarly, and differ in our attitude toward them as we do toward those we meet in our daily existence.

The expository method, nevertheless, is extensively used, perhaps because it is easier for a writer to state the characteristics of his figures abstractly than it is for him to devise concrete details which will suggest them; perhaps because expository statement can be made briefly; perhaps because many writers have not stopped to consider the problem of which is the better method. One disadvantage of this method in addition to those disadvantages pointed out above is that the author's explicit statements may not agree with the judgment which some reader may draw from the actions of the fictional person. In the *Forsyte Saga*, for example, Galsworthy represents a woman, by name Irene, in an idealistic way, repeatedly stating that she has great charm and representing men as falling victim to the power of her personality; yet to some readers she must seem despicable as revealed by her actions and lacking in charm in everything she says or does. In the same way it is dangerous for a writer to state that one of his characters is witty or clever, for readers may not think the sayings of the character justify the statement.

## IX. THE PURPOSE OF A NARRATIVE

One other constituent element of narration is "ideas." In addition to the type of story which is devised primarily to develop an idea (Mr. Galsworthy's plays are good examples) many, if not most, stories incidentally suggest ideas or general concepts. Indeed, we are likely to say of a story which does not do so that it is "pointless." The purpose may be a simple idea (honesty is the best policy, the inevitableness of retribution, the result of greed) or it may be so subtle that one finds difficulty in expressing it abstractly. It may dominate the story, or it may be only faintly suggested; it may be explicitly stated or may be merely hinted.

Perhaps we should state that by a purpose we do not mean a "moral." The purpose may be a moral one, but in many cases it is an idea which is not in the realm of morals at all. For instance, Shakespeare seems to have meant to suggest in *Romeo and Juliet* merely that some people are ill fated; the points of many of Mr. Kipling's stories are simply generalizations about human nature and the way human beings behave. Unless a moral idea naturally suggests itself because of one's plot, one should not make an effort to teach a moral or preach to the reader. The story fulfils its mission if it suggests in a vivid way a significant idea of any kind.

*Exercise:* Discuss two short stories, found in reputable magazines (*The American Mercury*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*) or in the works of Kipling, Stevenson, or Mrs. Wilkins Freeman, making specific comment on the basis of what you have read as to (a) plot, (b) background, (c) characters, and (d) the story's purpose.



X. THE KINDS OF NARRATIVE SUITABLE FOR  
STUDENTS' THEMES

## PERSONAL NARRATIVES

The developed pieces of narrative which students can best prepare as training in using the elements of this form are autobiographies, and accounts of certain trends in their lives, of periods, or of incidents. Perhaps at no time in the world's history has there been so much publication of this sort of narrative: nearly every notable man or woman who lives to considerable age produces one or more such works; many quite young writers (in one case at least a boy in the early twenties) and some people who are not in any way famous (The Bath-Chair Man, Barbellion, many magazine contributors) have published autobiographies or reminiscences. Moreover, a large amount of what purports to be fiction is autobiography; the first novels of most young writers of our day have generally belonged to this class. The interest in nearly all such cases is not in extraordinary incident or achievement but in the mental development of the writer; indeed, several such books of recent years have dealt with the author's school or college life (Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*, St. John Ervine's *Changing Winds*, Kipling's *Stalky and Co.*, and Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*).

In writing autobiographical themes, the student's purpose should be to make clear, as far as possible, the things which have gone to the making of his personality. A mere chronicle of the happenings of his life would have

no interest or importance. Just as in the writing of history nowadays, the scholar does not satisfy himself with the recounting of mere exterior facts (battles, sieges of towns, etc.) but tries to show the causal relation between them and the effects they produce, so, in the writing of autobiographical narrative, one must emphasize not the mere occurrences of one's life but the resulting effect on one's character. Such treatment, furthermore, is the only means by which one can hold a reader's attention, for the external events in the lives of most people today are too commonplace to have intrinsic interest. The reader will not care for an account of the schools attended, but he will be interested in the revelation of character and personality. Out of the great mass of memories of happenings and of people and of states of mind, the student should select those which have most bearing upon the development of his mind, feeling, interests, and tastes. Every fact which the student thinks of introducing into his account should be considered with reference to its influence on his development, and his attitude toward it should be made clear.

Material such as that used in autobiographical novels is at the disposal of every college student, and the development of it may actually serve the student well: thinking over the past and analyzing the essential factors in it, the student may come to an understanding of his strength and his weakness and may realize how he should manage his future. The analysis of the matter with which he is to work, moreover, will give his narra-

tive structure. Although the result may not always fall into scenes, it will still have suspense, conflicting forces, a climax or climaxes, background, characterization, and a point. Two excellent autobiographies of recent years, Ossendowsky's *Men, Beasts, and Gods* and Colonel Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert* have all these structural features. The structure will be still more evident if a student chooses, rather than a general autobiography, a study of an important aspect of his life, e.g., the development of a dominant ambition, or of an interest in a profession, the lifelong results of childhood environment, or some particular event or circumstance of his adolescence or early years.

Similarly, if a student uses a true happening in his life as a basis for a narrative, he will secure structure for it by reproducing it directly and dramatically. As a willing or unwilling actor in the actual event, he may not have been conscious of cause and effect, of conflicting forces (in personal reminiscence, these often take the intangible form of hope and despair or of faith and disillusionment), of the climax, of the resolution; yet, as he looks back upon the incident, he will find these elements present. His task is to make the reader distinctly and vividly aware of them so that the latter may participate in the event and be interested in the characters involved and the background which is their setting.

*Exercise:* Analyze "The Crow," pages 197 and the following, on the basis of what you have learned in this chapter concerning narrative.

## THE SHORT STORY

Next to personal reminiscence the best type of narrative for students to practice is the short story. This is a highly organized type of narrative, as we have said before, and at present is found in its most developed form in the current literature of America. The short story has entirely replaced the old-fashioned tale (Irving's *Rip van Winkle* and the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) from which it differs in having a well-knit plot and in using the dramatic method rather than the summary method of the tale. In the short story the writer excludes everything which is not of value in developing his plot, and he presents most of his material in *scenes* like those of a play. The similarity in structure and method between short story and play is so close indeed that often a short story can be turned into a play with but little effort or alteration, as has been done recently in the case of two short stories by W. Somerset Maugham. On the other hand, if compared with the novel, the short story shows fewer similarities. The plot of a short story is much simpler than that of the average novel: it deals with a single contest between two forces, which quickly reaches its climax; it covers much less time in detail and has fewer characters. These differences are dependent on the differences in length of the two forms. The short story cannot develop dramatically in its short compass the mass of incident which a novel has, nor can a play, a fact that is proved by the comparative failure of most dramatizations of novels. Auditors who have read the

novel are generally so conscious of the omissions made by the dramatist that the play seems to them fragmentary, incomplete.

*Exercise:* Read a tale (Irving's *Rip van Winkle*, or *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Hawthorne's *The Gentle Boy*, or *The Great Stone Face*) and a modern narrative without plot, e.g., one of Katherine Mansfield's stories. Compare them with each other. What has each form in common with the short story?

## XI. HOW TO PLAN A SHORT STORY

### ITS PURPOSE

In attempting a short story, one should have a definite purpose in mind—to suggest the quality of life in a particular community, to illustrate an idea, to present a character. For the plot, one may start with an actual incident and alter it as much as may seem desirable in order to get suspense and to produce one's effect. Or one may use the bare plot of some known piece of literature, planning it in a different background and altering it as the background, the characters, and one's point dictate. As all love stories have the same plot, all detective stories the same essential plan, this method is entirely legitimate.

### THE POINT OF VIEW

In planning the story, one should consider in particular what point of view will serve one's purpose best. One may tell the story from the point of view of one of the characters, giving only his knowledge and understanding of events as they unfold. Only scenes in which he is present can be narrated directly; others must be

reported to him. One may tell also what is in his mind throughout, or may give only what he says and what happens and is said in his presence. With a particular plot the effect gained from one point of view may be entirely different from that gained by the use of another point of view. Robert Browning once illustrated this fact by telling one story from the point of view of each participant in its action (*The Ring and the Book*). In particular, one should ask one's self, "From which point of view can I get suspense best?" Finally, one may use the point of view of the omniscient author who can narrate directly all scenes and reveal what is in the mind, the purposes and desires, of all the characters. This device is best for the psychological novelist, who wishes to study many minds; it is not generally effective for stories in which suspense is an important feature.

#### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHARACTER AND PLOT

In developing plots novelists differ in their method of work. Some, like Stevenson and Scott, decide upon a plot and then try to give reality to the people who are necessary for its development; others, like Dickens and Trollope, have a definite conception of the characters which they plan to present and the environment in which their creations move, and let the plot more or less develop by chance as a result of the characters' actions. The writer of a short story, however, usually has a plot definitely in mind, as does the writer of a play; and his task is to fit his characters so skilfully to his action that the reader feels that the plot progresses



because of the people created: because of what they do and what they say.

THE ELEMENT OF REALITY IN SETTING AND CHARACTERIZATION

To make both background and characters seem vivid, the student should draw upon life. One reason that historical novels are very often failures is that the author has not lived in the period and times he is depicting and so cannot make the setting seem anything but fictitious. For a similar reason, a wise student will not place his story in the South Seas or in India, if he has never been there; nor will he describe the haunts and practices of criminals of the East side of New York unless he has come into actual contact with such places and customs through social work or attendance at courts. For each character in a story a writer should have in mind a definite person whom he knows, and should use him as a nucleus of fact around which his imagination may play. By utilizing the life, scenes, and people with which he is familiar, the student will make his setting real and his characters human, not the innocent heroines, the manly heroes, the satiric villains of the cheaper cinema productions. He will also gain further reality for his characters if he presents them dramatically, for whatever may be one's opinion as to the preferable practice in literature, there is no doubt that the dramatic method is better in students' themes because it is more interesting to a reader, requires less maturity in the student, and trains him for effective suggestion of personalities in anecdotes and oral stories.

## THE SCENES AND THE BEGINNING

After one has decided upon plot, characters, and background, upon the purpose of one's story, and upon the point of view, one must plan the scenes just as a dramatist does. To make his plot structure sound, a writer should keep in mind the similarities between a short story and a play, and the ways in which the former differs from a novel. As a result, he will have as few scenes as possible; the time of the whole story will cover at the most a few years and more often a few months. In each scene, furthermore, the plot will progress logically, the people will act according to their character, and the resolution of the plot will follow quickly upon the climax.

Before starting to write, the student should read the introductions of several short stories, unless he is sure that he knows the methods of beginning. He will find that writers start not with the very beginning of their plot but rather after the plot has begun to involve itself, with a particular scene, a description of the background, of a person, a bit of conversation, or some striking piece of action. Such an opening differs radically in effect from the old-fashioned historical, explanatory beginning. Nowadays a writer seldom starts a short story with "the exposition" (i.e., the setting forth of action previous to the opening of the story and of the relationship between the characters), for such a method does not catch the reader's interest. When at the theater a play opens its first act with the characters' explain-

ing at length the situation which confronts the audience, the spectators fidget and yawn, obviously somewhat bored; so a story which opens with a long explanation of previous material will dull the reader's interest in proceeding. To some extent, of course, the beginning makes earlier events and relationships clear, but the point to remember is that the opening is direct and dramatic in effect in the modern short story and that it is most dangerous to start with a long-winded exposition of the situation in hand. The student's aim should be to catch at once the reader's attention and to amuse and entertain him from the very first words he writes. What facts necessary to the understanding of the story the writer cannot work into the opening scene are later presented in the course of the narrative by short explanations or by narration of reminiscence in the mind of one of the characters.

#### CONVERSATION

No other feature of a story is more pleasing to a reader than effective conversation. To be telling, the speeches should sound real, have point, further the story, and reveal the characters of the people. In particular, the writer must be careful not to make his people talk "like a book," i.e., not to use many words not common in actual talk and sentences complicated in structure and long. Of course the words should be more fit and the speeches more pointed than they would actually be in real life. Effective conversation in stories is more

skilful, the repartee more brilliant, the examples more pat, than the talk which we hear daily ever is. An actual transcript of the conversation of educated, fairly clever people would sound inept and lame in a story. On the other hand, the conversation must not be heightened too much; it must *seem* real. Of the other features of good conversation in narratives it is not necessary to say much. As the scenes in which it occurs are often the crucial ones by which the writer expects to present the plot, the talk must carry on the plot and make it vivid. And naturally the speeches must be in keeping with the characters of the people presented and must incidentally reinforce the reader's understanding of their personalities.

## XII. FICTION AND LIFE

One who has had some practice in writing narrative ceases to take his present and past environment for granted and begins to feel rather that his background is the setting for the drama or comedy of his life and that of the lives of those around him. If he once realizes that the everyday existence about him (the people he knows, the places with which he is acquainted, the events which happen) is the stuff for fiction, he will not only write interesting stories but will take a new interest in life and find it the most fascinating of short stories.

*Exercise 1:* Answer the following questions in regard to two short stories found in magazines or the works of standard authors. (a) What is the point of view in each story? (b) Do the plots seem to develop as the result of the actions of the characters? (c) Are the characters and settings based on real life? Give reasons for your

answer. (d) How many scenes are there in each story? (e) Are the beginnings dramatic? If not, how do they catch and hold the reader's interest? (f) How do the authors acquaint the reader with the events which have happened before the stories opened? (g) Criticize the conversations.

*Exercise 2:* What is wrong with the following plots?

a) The captain of the football team of a local college is kidnapped by the opposing side before the big game of the season. The first half goes sadly against his side. By his cleverness and daring, however, he escapes from the place of captivity and arrives in time to turn the game in favor of the home team.

b) A woman of forty-five has sacrificed her youth and her chances of education for her ten younger sisters and brothers whom she has sent through school by keeping a boarding-house. The brothers and sisters, now grown, are ashamed of their illiterate, dowdy sister. One day they find from the morning paper that she has written the novel of the year.

c) A man commits a burglary to which the town loafer and a stranger are witness. The culprit escapes, pressing his pistol and some of the robbed goods into the hands of the loafer; the police arrest the latter, not believing his statement that a stranger can give evidence that he is innocent, for no such man can be found. The accused is sentenced to a long term in the state penitentiary. In the train on his way there, he suddenly sees the stranger sitting near him. The stranger's help is secured, and, after a new trial, the prisoner is set free.

d) Two college men are of diametrically opposing types: one, popular and lively among the students, obtains good grades because he is a clever "bluff" rather than because he studies; the other is a "grind" and consequently is lonesome and out-of-things. Ten years after college, the clever "bluff," who has drifted from this position to that, applies to the manager of an oil company for a minor position. To his surprise the manager is his old plodding acquaintance.

e) Two young men go to the country fair grounds. They try all the various chances, watch the county races, mix with the crowd, and finally arrive at the public aeroplane field. One of the young men against the advice of his friend goes up with a stunt flyer. The machine gets out of control, crashes to the ground, and kills both occupants.

*Exercise 3:* In each of the summarized short stories which follow discuss:

a) The plot.

What are the conflicting forces; the climax; the resolution?

b) The purpose.

c) The point of view.

d) The scenes.

Approximately how many would there be in the developed story? What would happen in each of them?

e) The exposition.

What has happened before the story opened? How would the writer acquaint the reader with this information?

1. Under the prickings of his fellow-workers, a clerk boasts of his valorous exploits in the past, although by his demeanor and reputation he is obviously a coward. His companions decide to create a hoax danger in which he will show his true nature; he learns of the scheme and plans to fool the schemers by acting a rôle in keeping with his boasts. The danger, however, turns into an actuality; and the clerk, still thinking it unreal, becomes a hero.

2. A charity worker discovers that an old woman of the city known as a successful beggar has grown children, all in good circumstances. Thinking that the children refuse to support their mother, the charity worker secures a mandate from court and interviews them. They shamefacedly admit their relationship and, to the investigator's surprise, offer their co-operation. The old woman, however, refuses to become respectable.

3. A man and woman live on a small farm and constantly quarrel, for the woman earns what little she can running the farm, while the man spends all his time and all her earnings in raising exotic and unsuccessful plants. The neighbors sympathize with the woman, for at times they are forced to keep the couple from want. On the death of the man, the woman, much to the astonishment and chagrin of the neighbors, continues the unprofitable hothouse and flower garden.

4. A minister leaves a prosperous church in a large city to take charge of a small country community. The villagers cannot understand the reason he has done so and gossip accordingly. His manner of speech, of dress, his taste in literature, his manners are all looked



upon with suspicion. One day the wife of a deacon of the church comes upon the minister in a hotel in a nearby town in company with a young woman, Russian in name; in fact he stays all night in the same hotel with her. Feeling runs high in the village—but the young woman turns out to be the minister's daughter training for the operatic stage. She has changed her name for professional reasons.

5. Two prominent business men, rivals in a small town, respectively try to dispose of hoax oil stock and swamp real estate which they have been swindled into buying. Trusting each other's reputation for honesty, they exchange their poor investments, gleeful in the belief that they are at last getting the better of each other.

6. A famous actress returns to her native village, which she had left ten years before, because she remembers it under a romantic glamor. To her delight she finds the man who was her girlhood ideal is still unmarried. The village, however, proves quite prosaic and tiresome; the man, a bore.

7. A young couple in a small town, although still technically engaged, quarreled several years ago about a trivial matter. Each believing the other in the wrong, they have not spoken since that time; in fact the drug-store habitués have long established bets as to which one will break the silence first. A mild catastrophe throws the couple into each other's company and so develops that they burst into speech simultaneously—he, into profanity; she, into disdainful epithets.

8. In a colored community a plain spinster has long supported a dandy who has so far evaded making his benefactress his wife. Eventually desirous of money to buy a new suit, he promises to marry her on a definite day. On the day of the wedding, he becomes angry at the humorous jibes of his companions, and instead of making his way to the church to meet his waiting bride, he breaks into her cabin and steals her savings. The spinster hales her false lover into court where the understanding judge accuses him of house-breaking, theft, breach of promise, etc. The judge explains that most of these charges would not be valid were the defendant the husband of the plaintiff. The dandy eagerly marries his fiancée under the judge's benevolent eye.

9. Two school teachers of thirty-five, prematurely middle-aged, adopt an orphan girl of fifteen, planning for her the romantic kind of youth they themselves have missed. Each woman desires that the ward possess those qualities which she herself lacks, and trains the

girl by precept and example with this end in view. The girl, herself, wishes to forget her sex and study banking and finance, but acquiesces in their plans out of affection for them. Four years pass. Suddenly the ward realizes that by setting her an example each of her guardians has secured for herself the desirable feminine qualities and that she is but an obstacle between them and the middle-aged suitors who have appeared. So she joyfully embarks upon her career.

*Exercise 4:* Take one of the preceding plots and develop it into a short story. Be sure that you draw the background and characters from real life, that your opening and closing scenes are effective, that you present the whole action of your story dramatically, and that your characters converse with point.

### XIII. AN EXAMPLE OF NARRATION

#### THE CROW

The day was beautiful: a finer never graced the month of September, the month of fine days. Trees in full foliage, still green, showed in dark masses against a sky—that shade of blue that fills one with awe to behold. A soft, lazy breeze barely stirred the tree tops in the forest west of our tent and changed the river on the east into a field of tiny ripples. The whole atmosphere was as nearly ideal as civilization, represented by a squat log cabin and a storm-colored rail-fence far in the distance, allowed.

The shrill minor cry of a crow came suddenly from the opposite bank of the river; its faint echo returned after a short interval to make the quiet only more intense. The silence ended with a clear, jolly cry within the tent:

“Goin’ swimmin’ fellas?”

A lazy stir issued from under the canvas, indicative of a rapidly rising interest in the propounded question. Under the great oak tree without, I brushed an intruding fly from my nose, rolled over on one elbow, and answered, “Sure!” just as Heinie clad in nothing appeared at the tent flap. Straightway I got up from the grass where I had been dozing, undressed where I stood, and waited for the rest. The breeze which had seemed soft to my face as I lay with closed eyes under the oak now felt chilly and unpleasant against my body. Small white wind clouds were appearing over the tree tops at the west. My enthusiasm waned a little as I thought how cold the water had felt the day before, but the other boys were ready before I had

time to reconsider my decision and soon our six sunburned bodies were trailing the narrow path to the big rock which overhung the river at our "swimmin'" hole. The soft clay dust of the path showed bone white in the almost spent sun. The vague, sooty shadows were growing indistinguishably long. It was almost twilight, homesick time, but we were too busy now to think of anything more serious than our swim. We were a boisterous crew as we took the short cut across the forest clearing—pushing, yelling, jostling, talking, and laughing with each other. An old, leaky, flat-bottomed boat was at the bank, and four of us (three, who could scarcely swim and I, myself, who could keep afloat after a fashion) seized it and rowed up the river to a sand bar, which reached from bank to bank, making a sort of natural dam about a quarter of a mile from the "rock." The other two boys, Heinie and Jim we called them, remained behind to enjoy a few plunges from the ledge before swimming to join us.

Gurgles, shrieks, and clouds of filmy, white spray soon filled the air over the sand bar. Treble shouts, lucid indications of fun at another's expense, alternated with the prolonged, guttural drawlings of the one bearing the pleasure's brunt. After being ducked and soused several times I concluded that I had had enough and started to join Heinie and Jim. A sudden lull came just as I paused on the bar before diving. In that instant the grating cry of a crow broke the stillness; a pause—and its echo came back, scarcely audible. The clouds that were just above the tree tops when we had started had grown tenfold and were spread out across the whole horizon. Their silvery whiteness was diluted to a smoky grey, and they tumbled roughly over each other. At the cry of the crow and the faint echo in response, everyone stopped and looked at his neighbor and then at the gathering clouds; but after a short moment, the riotous tumult broke out again with renewed vigor. I plunged into the cold, clear water; with leisurely stroke, I arrived at calling distance from the rock, and, summoning Heinie to catch me, I again turned upstream.

After a few seconds I heard the peculiar splash which told me that Heinie had jumped from the "rock." (Heinie never tried to dive; he always jumped.) I swam on, but becoming tired, I turned on my back to rest and to look at Heinie. It was difficult to gaze directly over the water with its sunlit surface nearly level with my eyes, but a black head breaking the evenness of the surface and a series of regular splashes told me where he was. In the center of the stream, headed for the other bank, he was swimming irregularly.

As my eyes became more accustomed to the light I could see that the current was apparently carrying him down stream. Becoming somewhat alarmed, I called to him to see if he were all right; although I heard no reply, he was swimming so strongly by this time that I allowed my fears to be allayed. I thought he had not caught my question, or else I had missed his reply. I turned to go on but had no sooner faced upstream than I heard a short, sobbing, "Oh Bert." Immediately I wheeled and saw a hand disappear, leaving nothing but rapidly distending circles which broke the smoothness of the surface to mark the place.

A perfect bedlam broke loose within me: the earth spun and tipped, the sky turned black, and red and yellow spots flickered before my eyes. I felt completely helpless. Every moment seemed to make more clear what had happened, but I could not cry out—my voice clung in my throat. I felt my eyes straining till my head ached for one more glance of that precious hand. At last I managed to raise my voice above the turmoil and uproar at the sand bar to call that Heinie was "in." The boys responded quickly and without panic; yet it seemed ages while they splashed through the shallow water to the old boat. As soon as I heard the scow skidding over the sand bar downstream, I started toward the place where I had last seen a disturbance on the water's surface. Although the water was clear and quiet there, it seemed black and grewsome so that I hesitated to dive. Nevertheless, I gathered all my courage and plunged below the surface. I worked with feverish haste; I left no part of the rocky bottom which I could reach unsearched. When at last my companions in the boat arrived, they said my eyes were bloodshot and my lips green. I did not even try to brush the hair from my eyes. All I could do was to sit on the bank, stare stupidly at Jim, who plunged again and again until, worn out with exhaustion he, too, sat quiet and hushed by my side. One of the four in the row boat went for help, as if anything could help Heinie now!

Toward evening the sky became entirely overcast, and yellow streaks of lightning shot zigzag across the horizon. We, the five of us, gathered in a little group and talked in stupid undertones. Every once in a while we would look silently at the mysterious, turbulent river, and one of us would foolishly say, "Heinie's in." Then as it grew darker we became speechless; the wind for a moment died down, and mockingly the cry of a crow broke through the air. We paused; the words remained unspoken on our lips. Breathlessly we sneaked

back to camp just as the first huge drops of rain splashed with annoying thuds on the canvas.

What happened in the next few hours is a jumble of moving forms, lights over the water shining through inky blackness, and whispering groups in consultation. And at the end of all the tumult, I always see a pale drawn face and a green-blue hand bent at an uncouth angle at the wrist, and I hear the grewsome call of a crow and the hardly audible echo from the opposite bank.

## CHAPTER X<sup>1</sup>

### EXPOSITION

#### I. THE PRACTICAL USE OF LONG EXPOSITIONS

Expositions of considerable extent are generally the product of experts or professional writers. The former write on business conditions, problems of government, education, law, medicine, and the arts; the latter may treat the same subjects out of their own minds (as Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Arnold Bennett, and others do), or they may investigate subjects of current interest (as many magazine writers do). The college student, as a rule, has not the experience to qualify as an expert on any subject, and hence for long expositions he must rely either on reading or on investigation.

#### II. LONG EXPOSITIONS BASED ON READING: CHOICE AND LIMITATION OF SUBJECT

In the case of themes based on reading, it is best for the student to use subjects connected with the college courses which he is pursuing, because the instruction of those courses gives him background and some general understanding of material and methods. The social sciences (history, political economy, political science, and sociology) abound in good subjects for this purpose, and so do some of the other sciences, such as geology and

<sup>1</sup> The student is urged to reread chapter ii before starting chapter x.



geography. On the other hand, courses in elementary foreign languages and in such highly technical subjects as mathematics, physics, chemistry, anatomy, etc., offer but few opportunities for the writer of exposition because generally it is impossible to make discussion non-technical and clear to an ordinary reader, and expositions couched in technical terms are useless if for no other reason than because the composition-teacher cannot understand and criticize them. Considerable care is necessary in the choice and limitation of subject so that the subject may not be either too big or too small for adequate development in the space available. Generally the student can get counsel on this point from the teacher in whose field the subject lies.

If the student has not pursued studies which offer good subjects for extended exposition but has access to a library, he may use a limited subject of current interest for which recent books or articles in periodicals afford data. Current economic, social, or political problems, such as the success of prohibition in the United States, efforts to solve the problem of enforcing it in large cities, Canada's modified prohibition and its degree of success, the limitation of immigration into the United States and its effects, make good themes if developed with definite facts and statistics and citations of opinions of authorities. Perhaps it should be remarked that in developing a controversial subject in an exposition one must be unprejudiced and impartial. If one cannot take such an attitude (or does not wish to do so),

one should use the subject concerned not for exposition but for argument (see next chapter). In case of such a subject, the process of making the bibliography, of reading and taking notes, and of actually writing the theme, is the same as that in the kinds of subjects previously discussed.

### III. A CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

The next step in the preparation of an extended exposition is the compilation of a bibliography or list of books and articles which treat the subject. If the student is in residence at a college, he can get references from the instructor in whose field the subject lies, from the research librarian, and, if the college library has a subject index in its catalogue, from that source. The student should have at hand bibliography (or note) cards or slips; and on these he should write the name of the author, title of the book, number of pages in it, and the place and date of publication (in American books the place to look for the date is not on the title-page, but on the page following). One book only should be placed on each slip (see sample cards on next page).

If the list promises to be very long, however, there is little use in making it complete. Instead, the student should try to select the best references, fifteen or twenty in number. One obvious means of limiting the number of references is to omit all books published before a certain date, on the theory that the recent writers will incorporate all that is valuable in the earlier books and add to it whatever has been discovered or thought since.

*Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols.  
New York and London, 1901 (2d ed.).

Ernest A. Savage, *Old English Libraries*.  
Chicago and London, 1912. Pp. xv+298.

Exception should be made, of course, in case of any notable authority of earlier date. A better way of limiting the bibliography than by date is by consideration of authors, i.e., by restriction of the list to standard authorities and by omission of unrecognized authors. As to who is an authority and who is not, the student can ascertain from his instructor on the subject, from the author's position (which is usually printed on the title-page after his name), from preface acknowledgments of simplified books on the subject (which usually base their material on recognized works) and from observation of the authorities referred to in the course of his reading.

In the case of a student working at a distance from any library, it may be impossible to make a bibliography or to use it, if made. If such a student has access to four or five good modern works on his subject and has the background of a general course in which the subject was touched upon, he may proceed to take notes for his theme. If he has fewer reference books or no course in the whole field, he should not attempt to write on the subject. It may then be necessary for him to use a subject the data for which he can collect by investigation.

*Exercise:* Suggest three subjects (suitable for themes of 2,500 words) in connection with one of your courses which could be developed into interesting themes. For illustration of the kinds of subjects on which a student can write, consult the topics at the end of chapter ii. Though these are designed for themes of approximately 1,000 words or less with little or no reading, yet, if they are treated in a detailed, thorough fashion or if they are at times slightly enlarged in scope, they are good subjects for themes of 2,500 words based on

investigation. For instance, instead of "Cimabue's Position in the History of Painting," one might write upon "The Importance of Cavallini, Cimabue, and Giotto in the History of Painting"; through detailed treatment, one might enlarge a subject such as "The Renaissance Background of Browning's 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb'" so that the theme would be practically of any length.

#### IV. HOW TO READ AND TAKE NOTES

Following the completion of the bibliography, the student should proceed to reading and taking notes for the theme. Naturally he will first consult from his bibliography the latest and best book on the subject; he will read this carefully and take full notes on it. If his author, however, quotes or refers to a previous author's theory or opinion, the student must note the fact, and before he uses this theory or opinion in his theme, he must seek information concerning it in the work in which it first appeared and must footnote his paper so that the reader can go directly to the latter source. In selecting a second book from which to gather material, he will follow criteria similar to those which governed his first choice; on this book also he should presumably take careful and full notes—and so on through his list. By following such a method, the student investigator will find that he can pass quickly over the last books he consults, for they will offer little new material. He must, however, always be careful to give his full attention to any famous authority on his subject no matter what the author's date. Needless to say, in all his reading he must use his mind as well as his eye and pen; he must try to evaluate the information he gathers, to discriminate

between material effective and ineffective to the end he has in view, and to keep constantly before himself the fact that he is gathering matter for an *interesting* as well as an instructive article.

In taking notes for the theme, one uses small cards or pieces of paper of uniform size. In the upper left-hand corner of each card one should write a word or two indicating the topic or subtopic under which the note comes; on the same line in the right-hand corner one should note the name of the book or article from which the information has been obtained, together with the page number, etc. (Intelligible abbreviations may be used.) On the body of the card the note is placed. Good notes are those which are legibly written, and intelligently taken, i.e., clear, brief, well digested. They should not be slavish copy, yet should be full enough for anyone to read and understand. One way for the student to train himself to take good notes is to imagine that he is gathering information which must be intelligible to himself twenty years from now without further consultation of the books in question. Specimens of adequate notes follow—notes for a theme upon the English scholars of the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries.

The purpose of notes is not merely to recall ideas to the writer's mind but to preserve in a convenient form *all the facts and theories* which the student hopes to use in his theme. The notes should comprise a body of definite, concrete information, usually more information



Views of Jhn.Duns Scotus  
d.1308

Sandys, "Eng.Scholars"  
*Camb.Hist.*Vol. I,  
chap.x,p.234.

Opposed Th. Aquinas who aimed to bring faith in harmony w. reason. Scotus has less confidence in power of reason; tends toward Platonism, a realist: "the extravagant realism of Duns Scotus."

Learning in Eng.bef.12 cent:  
Theodore,Hadrian,Bede,&  
Alcuin.

Poole  
*Illust.of Med.Thot.*  
Introd.

Theodore, archp.of Cant. & Hadrian, abbot of St. Peter's there, established a school in which Grk. was thoroly taught. In Jarrow Bede showed extensive knowledge in classical lit. & natural science. Alcuin, like Bede, organizer of learning, man of wide reading, not an original scholar. In library at York, Alcuin mentions Grk. fathers and fair no. Latins: Virgil, Statius, Lucan, Bede, Pliny, Arist., Cicero (orations), Boethius, Donatus, Priscian, etc.

than the writer will actually use, i.e., one always takes down every fact that seems important, even though one is not sure that it will be wanted. Sometimes when the writer gets all the material together, such a note will prove to be one of the most important of items.

While the student is taking notes, he should be planning out the main heads into which the composition will fall; i.e., he should subject his material constantly to the process of "division." These main heads will usually be about the same as the "catch words" in the upper left-hand corner of the cards. As the writer takes his notes, or after he has taken all of them, he should place together all those with the same main heads. One should feel, however, the utmost freedom about rearranging the cards in a different order under the same heads, about dividing them into a greater number of heads, or about combining two or more heads under one, if reflection tells one to do so.

#### V. THE OUTLINE AND WRITING OF THE THEME

With his organized and classified notes completed, the student will plan his outline just as he did when writing informal exposition. The headings in the outline should be complete statements as before, but the outline will naturally be longer and more complicated. The student will then proceed to the actual writing of the article. This, however, should not consist of a slavish stringing together of the notes on the cards; rather, the student should be in possession of his body of informa-

tion much as in an examination he is in possession of the material of a course. Consequently he will write freely and fluently, using his notes to correct and enlarge his memory, to make exact what is hazy in his mind, to put at the reader's command concrete proof, quotation, etc., and to give the reader access to definite references in the form of footnotes.

The question of footnotes brings up the only new problem the writing of the article offers. Footnotes should give exact references to works which are authority for any points in controversy, which state outstanding opinions and theories concerning facts, or which contain statistics or facts confirming or opposing the theories or opinions cited. Moreover, all quotations from the books consulted should be inclosed by quotation marks in the text of the theme and should be acknowledged below by footnotes. In addition footnotes often contain facts which are needed for a fuller understanding of the text or which reinforce the points made by further proof, for such material is sometimes not incorporated in the theme itself because it breaks continuity of thought or theme-coherence or because it is of secondary importance. Footnotes are indicated by a superior figure (<sup>1</sup>, <sup>2</sup>, <sup>3</sup>) following and above the statement or quotation to be footnoted. When the reader sees the number, he consults the bottom of the page, where he should find a full and careful reference, containing the author's name, the exact title of the book, the place and date of publication, a page reference. For example, if one were writing upon

Thomas Paine, as a political and literary figure of his age, one would footnote such statements as these:

In a letter to his son-in-law, which Paine delivered in person, Franklin described Paine as an "ingenious, worthy young man."<sup>1</sup>

After the war a motion to reward Paine was lost in the Virginia legislature because of this pamphlet.<sup>2</sup>

*Common Sense* appeared anonymously but was eventually ascribed to Paine.<sup>3</sup>

Although Paine was regarded by many as an atheist, he always professed belief in God.<sup>4</sup>

Readers of his works do not agree as to their merits—they never have agreed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Moncure Daniel Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (2 vols., New York, 1892), I, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Upon its appearance *Common Sense* was attributed by some to Franklin, by some to Jefferson.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Merriam, *American Political Theories* (New York, 1903), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> For full information on this point consult Conway, *op. cit.*, I, 405-28.

N.B.: *Ibid.* means "there" and is used to refer to the last-named book, *op. cit.* means "work cited."

If one learns what to footnote, one will never be guilty of plagiarism (i.e., use of another man's ideas or words without admission that one has derived them from him). Every student should realize that there is no difference between plagiarism and theft but that, on the other hand, it is quite permissible for him to use another person's ideas or words if he acknowledges the fact.

One should be careful, however, not to overuse quotation or else the theme will have the appearance of a series of quotations, rather than that of connected discourse by one author. The student should train himself in expressing ideas or stating information in his own terms. Moreover, usually the student can make the points essential for his purposes more briefly than did the author from whom he derives them. Probably the orig-

inal author had in mind a purpose somewhat different from that of the student; hence, he may include material impertinent for the student's point, or he may phrase it in an oratorical style which is not in harmony with that of the student. In general one should quote an authority's actual statements only when (1) the author has expressed them with unusual neatness or force or (2) it is necessary to put before the reader the exact words of the authority on some point in dispute.

#### VI. LONG EXPOSITIONS BASED ON EXPERIENCE OR OBSERVATION

##### THE EXPOSITORY METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT

Subjects the material for which is gained through personal experience or observation are useful chiefly to the student who is not able to consult a library or has not pursued courses which offer good expository topics. Any person can find plenty of good subjects in the life about him; he can investigate and write on any important industry, on the management of any public institution, on the mode of life of any special community near him, etc. From experience come such subjects as these: the work of the Y.M.C.A. with immigrants, methods of teaching defective children, vocational schools (experience plus reading), methods of farming or of cotton cultivation in a certain district, and the activities of a social settlement. From observation or investigation (made particularly for the theme) come such subjects as, the work of detectives employed by large department

stores, the attitude of the students of a given school to religion, the methods of conduct of a complaint bureau in a department store, the work of the juvenile court; even the life and work of any tradesman, mechanic, or official, if developed with sufficient detail, can be handled effectively.

The chief source of information for such themes is interviews with authorities, with "the people who know"; yet to increase the range of his experience or observation and to complete it, the student should often also consult printed matter. If he has no library at hand, he can obtain pamphlets on many kinds of subjects from the different bureaus under federal, state, and city governments, from religious or lay organizations, etc. On the other hand, if he is fortunate enough to be near a library, he may combine many of the subjects suggested with extensive reading. For example, one may have spent several days in a juvenile court gathering information, but to make one's article more complete one may wish to learn something about the history of this institution and the methods of administering it in other cities. Hence one "reads up" on the subject. Although books are of great help in rounding out one's experience or observation, yet a careful student who has not access to a library or who cannot get pamphlet literature on the subject he chooses can still write an excellent, long exposition based merely upon what he has noticed and experienced and what authorities have told him about the matter. Whether the theme is derived wholly from this



kind of investigation or in part from it and in part from reading, the planning of the theme will proceed as in simple exposition. In developing the article, however, the author has a chance to use description of the people or the places involved in his subject and perhaps narration of incidents which illustrate his points—both obviously desirable because they arouse and hold the reader's interest.

#### THE NARRATIVE METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT

Both kinds of exposition we have considered in this chapter are developed in the same way, with explicit statement of facts and ideas and presentation of definite evidence, concrete examples, statistics, and comparisons with other facts and situations. They are practically pure exposition, pure informational writing, except that themes based on observation or experience may use some narration and description. There is, however, another way of developing this second type of theme besides pure exposition: if the student desires, he may employ a kind of informational writing which uses so much narration and description that it seems rather a series of anecdotes or brief stories than an exposition. This sort of writing appears chiefly as magazine articles, and for the last twenty-five years it has tended to replace the other type as the form for articles on business or social subjects. Almost any copy of a popular magazine will afford an example of this sort of writing. The subject may be the value of artistic window-dressing, the

value of budgeting family expenses, some problems of business credit, or some aspect of the management of a department store. Instead of developing the topic by explicit abstract statement of points and proof or exemplification of them, the writer gives a series of anecdotes which illustrate the results of the lack of good window-dressing or failure to plan family expenses on a budget, etc., and show the success attendant on the proper use of window-dressing or a planned budget. The purpose of the writer who follows this method is to interest and amuse his readers at the same time that he teaches or convinces them, and it must be admitted that many of these articles are quite as amusing as fiction. Whether the incidents narrated are actual happenings or not is unimportant. Probably at times they are drawn from observation or experience, and at other times are entirely invented. In any case they seem to be actually true and are developed with sufficient precise details to be convincing.

Informal and story-like as this type of exposition is, it must have a logical outline as its basis, just as the more formal exposition has. For instance, an anecdotal exposition on the work of department-store detectives, although it consists entirely of a series of amusing stories, really takes up in logical order the classes of criminals whom the detective must encounter, the methods he uses in detecting them, and his action when he catches them "with the goods." Thus loose and "chat-ty" as it seems, such an article informs the reader as

systematically as the formal exposition does and, because of its vividness, may impress him much more. The method, however, can be used only in articles based on material derived from investigation. Almost any such article can be treated in this way, with description of people and narration of incidents to illustrate points. As this is the most alive form of exposition, it is desirable that a student should attempt it at least once.

## CHAPTER XI

### ARGUMENT

#### I. THE VALUE OF FORMAL ARGUMENT

Some years ago Professor George P. Baker worked out the principles of formal argument and a system for constructing articles of an argumentative character. This system is so fundamental that any treatment of the form must be based on it. Yet widespread as is the recognition of its soundness, many teachers and students of composition consider that it is overformal and that instruction in it is not necessary because arguments of a formal character are not in demand. Those who hold this view, however, overlook two great values of the system: (*a*) it shows students how to think out argumentative subjects and gives them a formula for checking any controversial articles that they may read; and (*b*) it teaches students the structure which underlies all successful informal argument and much exposition. These intellectual and practical values of the system make a study of argument based upon it as important as any part of the training in composition.

#### II. HOW TO CHOOSE A SUBJECT

Argument strives to do one of several things; to prove a hypothesis, to justify a belief, to defend an attitude or a question of taste, and to urge a policy; but

only the last, i.e., a question of policy, *naturally* lends itself to formal argument. In defending a policy, in arguing for or against it, one necessarily groups one's material under subordinate points (the issues) and backs them with reasoning and fact (the proof). That questions of policy offer the best kinds of subjects for formal argument is shown by the practice of statesmen and interscholastic debaters, for the latter adopt usually some such subject and the former practically follow the brief form of outline, as the student can ascertain by consulting almost any congressional speech. Consequently such subjects as the policy to be pursued by a certain school in regard to elective courses, by a church board in regard to ministers' salaries, and by the federal government in regard to the Philippines are the best material for formal argument. On the other hand, in defending the nebular hypothesis or any other theory, the writer *naturally* follows a fixed form which does not resemble a brief: he states his facts, shows how the old hypothesis fails to explain some of them and how the new one accounts for all of them. In justifying an opinion or belief (e.g., the future greatness of the Chinese nation), or in defending an attitude or a taste, (e.g., the megalomania of Mr. Wilson or the superiority of Mozart over Wagner) one *naturally* develops the article not by a brief but by an expository outline, except that one does not pretend to be unprejudiced, as in pure exposition, but freely "takes sides." Opinions, beliefs, and matters of taste are often too irrational to warrant

developing even in informal argument, but when they can be defended on other than emotional grounds, they are best treated informally.

In developing formal argument the first work of the writer is to build a brief, which is merely a detailed outline of the argument. This, like the argument itself, is divided into three main parts: introduction, brief proper, and conclusion. Before the student can begin a brief, however, he must choose a subject to be argued; and from what has been said in the preceding paragraph, the student must realize that the best kind of subject, one which lends itself most spontaneously to formal development, will involve a question of policy. If the student desires to find a subject connected not with his school or church but with state, national, or city government, he often consults the questions argued by interscholastic debaters, or those discussed in periodicals of recent date. After such preliminary investigation, he may decide to argue on a phase of some such subject as "Child Labor in the United States." With merely this idea in mind, however, he could not begin to develop his brief, because the subject is too vague and undefined. It may be that the student, like many other people, does not realize that though he may live in a state which protects children from exploitation by labor, yet all children in all states are not so guarded. Certainly he must first have exact knowledge of the subject before he can decide what argumentative aspect of it he is going to develop, and this necessary information he



can obtain by reading some general discussions on the matter. When, through reading, the student learns that the states differ greatly in the degree to which they allow child labor, he might think that he would do well to argue for or against the advisability of Congress' regulating the matter; but on further investigation, he will find that Congress has twice passed laws with that end in view and that each time the Supreme Court has declared such a law unconstitutional. In addition he will discover that a constitutional amendment giving Congress the power to regulate child labor was subsequently submitted by that body to the states, which failed to ratify it.

### III. THE BUILDING OF A BRIEF: HOW TO FRAME THE QUESTION

By this time the student will probably have a strong enough opinion whether or not the states were right in their attitude, to phrase his proposition, to frame a sentence explicitly stating the point about which he will argue. In this instance it might be:

Congress should be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age.

He may argue for this proposition or against it. In the latter case he should insert *not* before *be*. A specific proposition similar to the one cited must appear as basis for every argument, for without it the writer is likely to shift position inside his article without realizing what he is doing, and the reader never feels sure where

the writer is standing. One cannot argue for or against a general subject or an idea expressed by a phrase; one must have a definite proposition thrown into sentence form. Moreover, this proposition must be precise and definite in phrasing. Even though the question "Should the education of nurses be put on a more academic basis?" is expressed in a sentence, it is still too intangible to be put to the reader or audience. One should decide what constitutes an academic basis, and rephrase the question as a whole, or at least substitute a specific phrase for the words "academic basis." Likewise, a proposition that states that such and such a policy is "right" is poorly phrased, because the question of right, like that of goodness and beauty, leads one into a metaphysical world of abstractions. Instead of arguing that the Nicaraguan policy of the United States is right or wrong, one had better phrase the proposition: "The United States should (*or* should not) withdraw its troops at once from Nicaragua."

#### IV. THE BUILDING OF A BRIEF: HOW TO PLAN THE INTRODUCTION

With the proposition framed, the writer proceeds to plan his introduction. The function of the introduction is to make clear all the background, basic material which is necessary to a comprehension of the argument. The introduction should be unprejudiced, impartial exposition, so planned and expressed that either side would willingly accept it as the introduction to its argument.

The first thing the introduction aims to do is to make the question clear to the reader by *defining* any ambiguous or unknown *terms* which appear in it. In the question cited above, the arguers probably would explain the words "to limit, regulate, and prohibit" by citing the second part of the defeated amendment, which runs: "The power of the several states is unimpaired by this article except that the operation of State laws shall be suspended to the extent necessary to give effect to legislation by the Congress." For a native audience no other terms would need explanation; in the case of other questions, however, two or three terms or more might necessitate definition. Yet the expression "definition of terms" must not mislead the student: a writer never goes to a dictionary for the desired definition. Sometimes he explains his terms by means of the history of the question, the necessary definitions evolving from this history practically as a limitation of the question to be argued. In cases of this kind the history of the question will precede the definition of terms. At other times the arguer explains a term by illustration, analysis, or exposition. For instance, if the question were: "Should life-imprisonment be substituted for capital punishment in cases of murder?" one would have to explain murder by distinguishing, as courts of law do, between murder and manslaughter. If one were arguing on the proposition that the Volstead Act should be changed to permit the manufacture and sale of light wines and beers, besides explaining the Volstead Act one would have to

define "light wines and beers" by specifying their alcoholic content. In defining a question, a student should remember that he is not going through an empty form; definition of terms is necessary to make the question clear-cut so that the reader or audience will understand the special sense and exact connotation which each word in it has for the arguer.

Following the explanation of terms may come any *historical information* necessary to an understanding of the argument. In the case previously used, there would be a brief history of the attempts of Congress to control child labor, twice by passing laws which were deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and once by proposing a constitutional amendment which was rejected by the states. In the next part of the introduction the writer may *wave* any aspect of the subject which is not essential to a decision but would merely complicate the discussion. In arguing proposals for amendments to the Constitution, it is customary for writers to waive their constitutionality, since the point does not bear on the essential merits of the proposal. Of course, the arguer must never waive a point which is strongly in favor of the opposing view and damaging to his own—such a procedure would obviously not be fair. In the subject cited above, for example, the affirmative could not waive the point that the state legislatures have already rejected the amendment, for that fact is one of the strongest arguments in favor of the negative. In a debate, however, *by agreement of both sides*, any

point may be waived. Further, at this place in the introduction one may *admit* any argument of the opposition, provided that doing so does not ruin one's own case; if this point is a strong argument for the opposing side, so much the better for one's own case! Thus the negative in the argument on the need of congressional control of child labor might choose to admit the necessity of protecting children from injurious employment and of securing to them adequate educational opportunity without in any way harming its own argument.

The next step which is essential in every argument need not be expressed in the brief or argument. It consists in a statement of the main points made by both sides (grouping under one main heading those pro and under another those contra) and of the issues which emerge from such a "clash of opinion." The writer gains his knowledge of the main points of the opposition by reading arguments in favor of its views, for naturally one cannot meet the opponent's points without knowing what they are. Similarly, one gains knowledge of the main points on one's own side by reading the arguments published for that view, but one may add original points if they seem worth while. Sometimes certain of the points pro and contra will be identical except that one will be positive, the other negative. From the two groups, the student can draw statements of the essential points in dispute, the issues. For the subject under discussion the "clash of opinion" might be worded thus:

## PRO

1. State regulation of child labor is not satisfactory.
2. Regulating child labor by federal law is right in principle.
3. Regulating child labor by federal law is practical.
4. No other method of regulating child labor can adequately solve the question.

## CONTRA

1. There is no necessity for congressional regulation of child labor.
2. Congressional regulation of child labor is impractical.
3. Regulation of child labor by federal law is dangerous.

*Exercise:* Consult the brief for the affirmative on pages 229-34 and point out how it meets topic 3 under "Contra": "Regulation of child labor by federal law is dangerous."

After considering the "clash of opinion," the arguer for the affirmative might frame the following *issues*:

1. Is state regulation of child labor satisfactory?
2. Is congressional regulation of child labor right in principle?
3. Is congressional regulation of child labor practical?
4. Is congressional regulation the only method which can adequately control child labor?

Obviously, if the writer for the affirmative can prove his view of these, he has demonstrated convincingly the justice of the proposition, for in doing so, he has met every essential point of the opposition and demolished it. Thus, in developing the issues, one has narrowed the whole mass of argumentative points and ideas down to the essential questions on which the decision turns. The process has a double value: (*a*) it enables the writer to determine just what he must prove, and (*b*) it equips the reader with information which helps him to judge throughout the argument whether the writer is meeting



all points of the opposition and offering strong points of his own, and to determine at the end whether the writer has proved his case or not. The main contentions of the two sides need not be stated in the brief or argument; but *the issues should be stated in both*, invariably. Generally it is best to state the issues as questions, because positive statements may prejudice the reader.

Strictly, the negative need not go through all the steps indicated above, because if the negative merely meets the main points of the affirmative and shows that they are not valid, the case made by the affirmative falls. Hence all that the negative *must* do is determine the main points of the affirmative, state them in the introduction, and in the body of the argument take them up one by one to overthrow them. Generally, however, it is not possible to disprove all points made by the affirmative to so convincing an extent as to make a purely negative argument advisable. The very fact that opinions on the question are divided implies that there are impressive points on both sides. Hence, if the negative is to make the strongest possible impression by presenting its own independent points against the proposition, it is best for that side to go through all the steps indicated and state the issues. Ideally the issues for the affirmative and negative should be the same, but practically they always vary in one or more points. Consequently a negative brief which develops issues of its own will seldom be identical with one which merely meets the points of the affirmative. Usually an effective

negative brief not only meets the contentions of the positive but, by developing issues of its own, adds to its rebuttal, powerful points against the proposition.

V. THE BUILDING OF A BRIEF: THE FORM  
AND CONTENT OF THE BRIEF PROPER

The introduction ends with the statement of the issues. The brief proper, which is purely argumentative, opens with the proposition stated in a negative or positive fashion. It uses as its main headings, the issues worded in a way which is favorable to its main view. (See the affirmative brief which follows.) By a series of subheads (of primary, secondary, tertiary, etc., rank) the brief proper attempts to prove the main heads. Every subhead states a reason for its immediately preceding superior head or proof of the latter. It may be advisable even to put *for* after each heading which has dependent heads, as a sort of check or reminder that according to this scheme one cannot possibly give a series of points and follow them with a conclusion drawn from them. The conclusion must stand first and the reasons must appear under it as subheads.

VI. THE BUILDING OF A BRIEF: THE FORM  
AND CONTENT OF THE CONCLUSION

When every issue has been developed as a main head with subheads proving it, the brief proper is complete. The conclusion which follows is merely a summary of the main heads of the brief proper and the proposition. It may take any form that seems effective, for instance:

## CONCLUSION

- Since (I) state regulation of child labor is not satisfactory,  
 (II) Congressional regulation of child labor is right in principle,  
 (III) Congressional regulation of child labor is practical, and  
 (IV) no other method than congressional regulation can adequately control child labor,

therefore

Congress should be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age.

or,

## CONCLUSION

We have shown that Congress should be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age,

- because (I) state regulation of child labor is not satisfactory,  
 (II) congressional regulation of child labor is right in principle,  
 (III) congressional regulation of child labor is practical, and  
 (IV) no other method than congressional regulation can adequately control child labor.

Perhaps at this point we might survey the whole process and effect of the argument as it appears to the reader. First we have made clear to him the background of the subject, its essential elements, and the points in dispute. Then we have proved to him that our interpretation of each of the points in dispute is correct. Finally we remind him that we have met every point of the opposition and proved some points of our own and that therefore we have demonstrated the truth of our proposition. By this method of presentation the reader always knows where he is and how the writer is meeting

the demands of the subject; and if the writer gives really convincing proof of his assertions, the reader knows that he has proved the whole proposition. It is surely obvious that a method of presentation which enables the reader to follow an argument so easily and to judge its validity so perfectly is well worth the small effort involved in mastering it.

#### VII. A SPECIMEN BRIEF

Should Congress be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age?

##### INTRODUCTION

###### *History of the question:*

- I. Twice Congress by act of law tried to regulate the employment of children.
  - A. The act of September 1, 1916, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the case of *Hammer v. Dagenhart* (1918).
  - B. The act of February 24, 1919, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the case of *Bailey v. Drexel Furniture Company* (1922).
- II. On June 2, 1924, Congress passed the Child Labor Amendment and submitted it to the state legislatures for ratification or rejection.
  - A. The states rejected it.

###### *Definition of terms:*

- I. The terms "to limit, regulate, and prohibit" are best defined by the second part of the defeated amendment.
  - A. "The power of the several states is unimpaired by this article except that the operation of State laws shall be suspended to the extent necessary to give effect to legislation enacted by the Congress."

###### *Both sides agree:*

- I. To waive the question as to whether or not such an amendment is constitutional.

- II. *To admit* the necessity of protecting children from injurious employment and of securing to them adequate educational opportunity.
- III. *To limit* the question under discussion to the advisability of granting to Congress the right to share in the power of regulating child labor, a right now resting entirely with the governing bodies in the several states.

*The issues:*

- I. Is state regulation of child labor satisfactory?
- II. Is congressional regulation of child labor right in principle?
- III. Is congressional regulation of child labor practical?
- IV. Is congressional regulation the only method which can adequately control child labor?

BRIEF FOR THE AFFIRMATIVE

*Proposition:* Congress should be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age.

PROOF

- I. State regulation of child labor is not satisfactory, for
  - A. Individual states have failed to give children adequate protection against industrial exploitation, for
    - 1. In the census of 1920 there were over half a million children between the ages of ten and fifteen at work, all in need of industrial protection.
    - 2. Nine states permit children to go to work at fourteen without the ability to read; eighteen states do not make physical fitness for work a condition of employment; twelve allow children under sixteen to work nine to eleven hours; thirty-three permit children to oil, wipe, and clean machinery in motion, etc.
    - 3. State laws are abused, for
      - a) Manufacturers in New York send work across the Hudson River to New Jersey, where if detected they could not be prosecuted.
      - b) Children are moved from states where they are not allowed to work to states where they are, as is illustrated by cases in the Carolinas and Georgia.

- B. If the amendment is not ratified, the movement against child labor has not enough vitality in the individual states to continue, for
1. It is evident that child labor is on the increase, for
    - a) The number of working permits granted children is greater every year.
    - b) Certain economic conditions increase the demand for child labor, for
      - (1) Restricted immigration has limited adult labor.
      - (2) The increased number of simplified machines makes child labor valuable.
  2. Two years ago the public press was full of discussion of the question of child labor, but today it is silent.
  3. In states where the child labor evils are greatest, it is difficult to develop a fair and just public attitude on the question, for
    - a) In these states there is much propoganda, sponsored by the manufacturers.
- II. Congressional regulation of child labor is right in principle, for
- A. The question of the regulation of child labor is nation wide in its scope, for
1. A sovereign nation should have the power to protect its future citizens, for
    - a) A nation is no stronger than its children.
  2. Child labor is a social detriment to the whole nation.
- B. Congressional regulation of child labor would not be a violation of states' rights, for
1. The power of regulation would be voluntarily given by the states to Congress.
  2. Congress would establish the minimum protection for children, leaving the states free to pass and enforce additional labor laws.
  3. The whole purpose is simply to provide for effective co-operation between the states and Congress so as to secure children's rights.
- C. The defeat of the amendment does not indicate that "the will of the people" is against congressional regulation, for
1. The state legislatures were misled by such words as "nationalization of children," "bolshevism," "bureaucracy," "socialism," etc.



2. Defeat of the amendment in Massachusetts through popular referendum was due to widespread paid propaganda.
3. A comparison of the forces which support and oppose congressional regulation indicates what is the "true will of the people," for
  - a) The following people, parties, and organizations in favor of congressional regulation represent the "will of the people": four presidents of the United States; eminent lawyers and judges of the country; the Congresses of 1916, 1919, 1924; the state and national platforms of both parties of 1924; national organizations of unselfish and humanitarian interests.
  - b) The following organizations opposing congressional regulation represent not the "will of the people" but that of vested interests: manufacturers' organizations and farm organizations.

### III. Congressional regulation of child labor is practical, for

- A. The second child labor law was in effect thirty-five months and it was a success, for
  1. Many states made great advances in their regulation of child labor, for
    - a) Alabama and West Virginia made their laws stringent.
  2. During this period state and federal officers effectively co-operated, for
    - a) Federal enforcement operated only where state enforcement was lacking or failed to function.
- B. Congressional regulation will not interfere with the laws of individual states, for
  1. Every state can enact and enforce its own laws.
  2. The direct effect of federal laws will be felt only when they are higher in their standards than state laws.
- C. Federal laws in regard to the regulation of child labor can be enforced without appreciable expense to the people, for
  1. Their administration will not build up a vast government bureau, expensive in its maintenance.
  2. The cost of the enforcement of the first child labor law was slight, for

- a) It was \$111,000 for nine months, or about one quarter of one cent per year for each citizen of the United States.
- D. The power delegated to Congress by such an amendment would not be extreme, for
1. The defeated amendment, although broad in its terms, is clear and concise enough in its wording to prevent abuse.
  2. Congress would not use its power to an unreasonable extent, for
    - a) Congress would not prevent children from helping parents, working on farms, selling newspapers after school, etc., if the nature of the work and the environment are not detrimental to the children.
    - b) The former federal laws indicate the general character of legislation that may be expected.
- IV. No other method than congressional regulation can adequately control child labor, for
- A. The existing method of state regulation has failed signally, for
1. In argument I we have shown how inadequate is this method of regulation.
  2. The state governments are always more interested in gain than is the federal government and in consequence cannot have the welfare of their children uppermost in mind.
- B. Various state laws in regard to school attendance are not substitutes for child labor laws, for
1. Where children under eighteen are allowed to work in factories, etc., school attendance laws do not prevent them from doing so.
  2. Laws in regard to school attendance cannot regulate the conditions of employment for those children who are permitted to work in various capacities.

## CONCLUSION

- Since (I) state regulation of child labor is not satisfactory,  
 (II) congressional regulation of child labor is right in principle,  
 (III) congressional regulation of child labor is practical, and  
 (IV) no other method than congressional regulation can adequately control child labor,

therefore

Congress should be granted the power by federal amendment to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age.

*Exercise:* On the basis of the text of this chapter, answer the following questions in regard to the preceding brief, always giving reasons for your answers:

1. Is the brief as a whole in good form?
2. Is the proposition well phrased?
3. Does each of the four parts of the introduction fulfill its purpose?
4. Is the introduction impartial?
5. Do the issues adequately cover the question?
6. Is the proof logical?
7. Are the issues proved?
8. Are the arguments of the opposition fully met?

#### VIII. CAN YOU THINK LOGICALLY?

In the development of the proof, sound, logical thinking is necessary. Many people think logically without conscious effort, but some, and those not infrequently in high places, find great difficulty in understanding what is the actual cause of a certain result and what constitutes real proof. For the latter, some guidance is necessary if they are to write respectable argument. This guidance is provided by certain categories of thought to be explained shortly, but it does not relieve the student from mental effort. In fact, it merely provides certain criteria or checks by which he can judge the validity of his reasoning. As he goes over each part of his proof, he must ask himself: "To what type of thinking does this belong?" and "Does it satisfactorily meet the conditions required in that type of thought?" If the student who finds difficulty in thinking soundly (a fact which

the teacher is bound to reveal) will go through every bit of his own reasoning in this way for a short time, he will soon drill his mind to right methods of thinking.

#### IX. DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE REASONING

The strongest modes of reasoning are those called "deductive" and "inductive." The former proceeds from general principles to the particular case involved. It comprises three parts: the major premise; the minor premise; the conclusion, which is composed of the subject of the minor premise and the predicate of the major premise.

Major premise: All men are created free and equal.

Minor premise: Tom and Bill are men.

Conclusion: Tom and Bill are created free and equal.

If the major premise is a real universal truth, and if the minor premise is comprised within it, this type of reasoning cannot be attacked. As a rule, however, there is more or less doubt as to the truth of the major premise, or the minor premise does not surely come within the major one. Hence the person using this form usually tries to bolster up one or other of the premises with some proof. Conversely the opponent seeks to attack the one or the other. In the case cited above, the minor premise can hardly be impugned. The weakness of the reasoning there is in the major premise; and if the writer or speaker proceeds to interpret the conclusion as meaning that Tom and Bill are actually equal before the eyes of the world, his opponent could have a merry time with him. He could point out that the major premise means

at most only that in childhood and early youth people are equal, or perhaps that before God they are equal. He could show that the mental endowments of people differ vastly, not to speak of the advantage which those born into rich and powerful families have over those of low degree. Hence he could destroy any practical use of that argument.

On the other hand, in the following piece of deductive reasoning, the minor premise is weak:

Major premise: All worthy charitable projects should be supported.

Minor premise: X is a worthy charitable project.

Conclusion: X should be supported.

The one who uses that reasoning must strengthen the minor premise as much as he can with evidence showing that X really is worthy, for his opponent will surely attack it. Thus, if X is a charity ball, the opponent may cite evidence of actual cases in which the receipts of charity balls have merely met expenses. If X is a church army modeled after the Salvation Army, he may cite evidence to show that it is a fraud, using the devices of a genuine institution merely to make a living for its members. Thus it is the business of the person who uses deductive reasoning to strengthen its weak member, and of the person who attacks the reasoning to bring evidence against the weak premise.

Inductive reasoning proceeds in the opposite way; that is, it collects a mass of details concerning a single class and thus tries to establish a general rule or law. This is the method of modern science, the one in best

repute nowadays. Its only pitfall is the possibility that the reasoner may not have collected enough facts. His duty, if he cares for truth, is to try to find out whether there are any facts not consistent with his law, and if there are, to discard or modify it. His opponent must seek to find facts which are clearly inconsistent with it and thus shatter his reasoning. Each main heading in the brief proper is made up in this way, the subordinate heads giving the facts which lead to the induction. The opponent can attack any or all main heads by marshaling evidence which shows that the induction is not perfect. For example, in overthrowing I, A, of the specimen brief, "Individual states have failed to give children adequate protection against industrial exploitation," the opposition would point out that the affirmative have overlooked several things: (1) under state regulation the number of children employed during 1910-20 decreased so that in recent years children have not been an important factor in the labor situation; (2) the southern states, which face complicated economic problems in connection with child labor, have made the most progress in handling the situation, while the District of Columbia, under congressional regulation, is the only part of the country which shows an increase in the number of children in gainful employment; (3) under state regulation of labor the increased attendance at school during 1910-20 was so great that it included many children of poor mental ability and it overtaxed available resources in both money and teachers; etc. The



negative would prove such statements with facts and statistics and consequently would maintain that the affirmative is wrong in its assertion, for the individual states are bravely, wisely, and generously solving the problem bit by bit.

Thus one can see that inductive reasoning is the very backbone of a brief. In a crude way the main heads of a brief may be conceived usually to be like the following:

- I. There are abuses in the present system.
- II. The proposed plan will remedy the abuses.
- III. No better plan is known.

Almost all briefs which are arguing a question of reform fall either wholly or in part into this pattern. The affirmative side tries to prove each main heading with a series of facts and points which seem to make the judgment expressed in the heading inevitable. The opposing side may admit any two of the three headings and attack the third, giving reasons and facts which tend to show that the third is not true; or it may attack any two, all three or part of one or more of them in the same way.

*Exercise 1:* The specimen brief is concerned with a question of reform. How far does it conform to the pattern discussed in the preceding paragraph?

*Exercise 2:* Consider I, B, of the specimen brief. What part or parts under it would the negative admit as a whole? In part? How would it answer the part or parts it does not admit?

As the student has seen, deductive reasoning can be thrown into and tested by a threefold syllogism; inductive reasoning, on the other hand, has but two parts:

the first consisting of a representative collection of particulars, the second of the general conclusion drawn from these particulars. In inductive reasoning the section containing the particulars and the conclusion based on them is always expressed in full; in deductive reasoning the conclusion is usually expressed, but often either the major or minor premise is suppressed. When one says, "Pete has been absent from class for a week. He is too conscientious a student to be cutting; so he must be ill," one is reasoning deductively and suppressing the major premise: Conscientious students who are absent from class for a week are usually ill. Although in brief-making we use inductive argument almost to the exclusion of deductive argument, yet at times we almost unconsciously base a section of a brief on deductive reasoning, and at the same time word it so that it appears to be inductive. Take, for example, the following section of the specimen brief:

- II. Congressional regulation of child labor is right in principle, for
  - A. The question of the regulation of child labor is nation-wide in its scope, for
    - 1. A sovereign nation should have the power to protect its future citizens, for
      - a). A nation is no stronger than its children.
    - 2. Child labor is a social detriment to the whole nation.

One can throw this section of the brief into four syllogisms; the first would be:

Major premise: Congress should have control of questions nation-wide in scope.

Minor premise: The question of child labor is nation-wide in scope.

Conclusion: Congress should have control of child labor.

The rest of the brief, however, is practically all truly inductive in reasoning—a method of argument which is strong or weak according to the quality and completeness of evidence upon which each main point rests. This observation leads us to a consideration of what is convincing proof, but first we shall take up briefly the other kinds of reasoning which writers use in arguing.

*Exercise:* From the section of the specimen brief quoted above make at least two more syllogisms.

#### X. OTHER FORMS OF REASONING

The other modes of reasoning are weaker than the two just discussed. Of these, *a priori* reasoning is a weak form of deduction, in which the major premise is merely an assumption, a generalization made on incomplete observation. To it belong our conclusions based on prejudices—e.g., so and so is not a sincere person because he has an affected speech (based on the assumption that all persons whose speech is affected are insincere). This form of thinking enters into many of our judgments and opinions because we have not time or opportunity to test all the generalizations which we make on insufficient experience, but it has properly no place in argument. We should not attempt to make a point unless we have tested its major premise.

Another type has been called *post hoc, propter hoc*, i.e., it reasons that of two events, the one which precedes the other is the *cause* of the other. This sort of reasoning is at the basis of many a superstition: A black cat crosses one's path. Later one has an unpleasant experi-

ence and therefore concludes that the black cat was responsible for the occurrence. Many common opinions as to the cause of illnesses and the means of their cure are based on this reasoning. Shaw parodies this kind of thinking in the person of the general practitioner in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, who recommends ripe green gages as a panacea for many human ills. Obviously the general practitioner is using an incomplete form of induction, so weak that it is hardly more than guessing. To make his theory more than that, he would have to show that all illnesses have a certain something in common, that green gages have a specific medicinal property which affects this certain something, and that in each particular illness there is no other condition present which could account for the cure. In short, he would have to build up his reasoning to such an extent that it would become induction. Similarly using *post hoc, propter hoc*, the advocates of prohibition point to the fact that since prohibition the amount of money in savings accounts has increased, and argue that prohibition has brought about this economic condition. Now, truth to tell, prohibition may be the cause of the increase in bank deposits, but until one has proved that all the other possible industrial and economic factors are not causes of the increase, one cannot assume that prohibition is a cause at all, much less the sole cause of this financial prosperity.

One of the most popular ways of reasoning is that of *analogy*. This presumes that because of an apparent

similarity between two things, a conclusion that is known to be true of one is true of the other. It is like a figure of speech (especially a simile) but different in that the simile uses a comparison merely to make an idea clear, but analogy uses it to prove a point. The weakness in this type of reasoning lies in the fact that though the two things are similar, they are not identical and may differ in just the points which are essential to the argument. In general, analogy makes a specious appearance, and it may actually have a great effect on an ignorant or thoughtless audience. Thus Lincoln, in urging an audience to support the party which was in office during a crucial time, told them not to swap horses in the middle of the stream. Of course there is an element of truth in that comparison; continuity of administration *is* an advantage in any country in time of trouble. But the point would have no value if it could be shown that the administration was corrupt or incompetent. Thus the analogy ignored far more important elements than the one on which it was based. Often the analogy involves an incomplete induction followed by a deduction. Thus, if a mother argues that Irene should be given piano lessons because her cousin, Mary, has taken some and already plays well, she first makes a general law that piano lessons which have proved successful in Mary's case will prove successful in the case of all children (a tremendous assumption, as all who have had to listen to bad piano-playing can testify), and then concludes that Irene, since she is a child, falls under this generali-

zation. This second step is a sound enough deduction; Irene's mother made her mistake in not realizing that Mary is probably different from other children in having a good ear, auditory memory, and imagination and that Irene may have none of these qualities. From the foregoing discussion it must be clear that analogy is a dangerous form of reasoning, and it is not too much to say that it should be avoided entirely. If the point is really a good one, it can be made in a better way.

*Reductio ad absurdum*, the last kind of reasoning we shall discuss, is used wholly in refutation. One takes an assertion made by an opponent, pushes it to what *seems* to be its logical extreme, and by so doing shows one's readers how the contention is *apparently* absurd. Very often, however, this kind of refutation is mere sophistry, i.e., the arguer in using it is not fairly facing the full and true meaning of the opponent's contention but rather seizes on some phase of it, shows how ridiculous that aspect is, and leads the reader consequently to believe that the whole contention is foolish. At first reading the following bit of refutation seems convincing:

The proposed amendment would give to Congress the arbitrary power to enforce idleness upon any part of the population that had not reached the age of eighteen. Although no state in the Union has forbidden employment of youths above sixteen and many of the states do not extend the period of legal control of child labor beyond fourteen years (a period which is generally accepted as the termination of childhood), Congress is asked "to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of all persons under eighteen," whether such labor be in the factory, the home, or on the farm. It may be legal to marry at fifteen and become a parent, but according to federal amendment it will be illegal to work. Statistics of 1920 show that there were then



24,909 males of eighteen years of age married and many thousands of lesser age; that there were 41,626 females of sixteen married, 90,930 of seventeen, and 186,645 of eighteen. If the married part of the population of the United States represented by these statistics cannot work, if the fathers are to be prohibited from gainful employment, the mothers from ten to twelve hours domestic labor, one wonders who is going to support them and their children.

But as soon as one carefully considers the paragraph, one realizes that the negative has not fairly faced all the facts involved, for it has assumed that Congress would feel it obligatory straightway upon the adoption of the amendment to forbid the labor of all persons under eighteen years of age. The truth of the matter is, of course, that though the amendment will give Congress such power, it implies no such obligation and that Congress neither in the use of other powers it possesses nor in the two child-labor laws it tried to pass has given any sign that it will immediately rush to extremes in legislation and abuse such power. The negative has really misinterpreted the proposed amendment so that it can gain its point—a practice which is avoided by writers who wish to win the allegiance of an intelligent audience. Consequently, in using *reductio ad absurdum*, a student must make sure that he has considered the whole and true meaning of the contention he is desirous of overthrowing, or else he harms rather than benefits his case.

In the preceding paragraphs, the student may notice some examples which remind him of advertisements. It is true that advertisements use argumentative reasoning for the purpose of convincing readers that they

should purchase the products advertised. As (for reasons of narrowness of space) they are usually expressed in succinct terms, they offer admirable material for studying modes of thinking. If the student will examine them, keeping in mind the criteria which we have been trying to establish, he will be astonished to realize how weak their arguments really are. General rules or laws based on one fact are common; deductions based on assumed general laws (hardly stronger than *a priori* reasoning), analogies, and cases of *post hoc propter hoc* thinking are easy to find. But logical argument requires stronger reasoning than advertisement does. In fact, of all the forms of reasoning discussed in this chapter, the student should use only induction and deduction, and he should scrutinize each case with care and strengthen it at any point where it seems weak.

#### XI. WHAT CONSTITUTES PROOF

In addition to sound reasoning, a successful argument offers proof, for the critical reader is not satisfied to accept mere statements of opinion from the writer. Even if the point which the writer is making appears reasonable and sound, he strengthens it if he substantiates it with proof. Thus, if the point to be made is that it pays schools in poor districts to provide penny lunches because well-fed children learn better than hungry ones, statistics showing improvement in scholarship in a school which introduced such lunches should be given. The best proof (or evidence) is definite facts, whether

in the form of statistics or specific instances which tend to demonstrate the point. Evidence like the following has some weight because it makes use of facts:

During the nine months between its enforcement and its annulment the first child-labor law cost \$111,000. Basing an estimation upon this fact, Miss Grace Abbot, head of the Children's Bureau of Labor, calculated that federal regulation of child labor would average \$200,000 per year or about one quarter of one cent per person per year. One can consequently see that congressional control of child labor will not appreciably increase the taxes of the citizens of the United States.

No one can impugn such statistics, for as statistics they are beyond criticism; yet a sharp-witted opponent will question the validity of the conclusion drawn from them. He will point out various things which seriously impair their worth as proof: that the statistics were compiled when the machinery of the various states for enforcing their own child-labor laws was in operation; that there is no assurance of the states' continuing such machinery or even such laws if the control of child labor becomes a federal affair; that the figures do not include the increase in educational tax which would result from the fact that additional children would be compelled to attend school; that the figures do not estimate the cost to the public of feeding and clothing children who now support themselves; etc. These and other considerations the opponent would rightfully put to the reader so that the latter could not accept \$200,000 per year as a true estimate of the cost of federal control of child labor.

Although statistics ought to be sound proof, yet they are not always so. Even if one excludes the pos-

sibility of drawing several conclusions from them and accepts them on their face value, one will often find them so self-contradictory as to be dubious evidence for a point. Everyone with an open mind cannot but be astounded at the different statistics the prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists marshal in proof of their arguments. On the one hand, statistics cited by an organization against prohibition show that crime due to intoxication has been on the increase since the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment; on the other hand, statistics quoted by an organization in favor of the Amendment prove quite the opposite thing. In cases of this sort the best thing for the student to do is to check up such figures, if he possibly can, by reports from an unprejudiced source. For example, in arguing that the state of X should have a law establishing a minimum wage for women, one can refute the negative's contention that such a wage would throw a large number of destitute women upon society by quoting from the non-partisan report of the Boston Social Union. A committee was appointed by this society for the purpose of aiding women thrown out of employment in Massachusetts by the passing of a minimum wage law in that state. It began its task by soliciting information from the Minimum Wage Commission, from the department stores, from various social agencies. With the aid of such information it followed up seventy cases of shop-girls who were deprived of work as a result of the law and found that most of them after a time secured em-

ployment at increased salaries, so that at the end of the year they would have made up their financial loss and would have begun in the second year to benefit by their advance in salary. The committee, therefore, concluded that as far as the shopgirls were concerned the law brought about no financial loss to the group as a whole. In a similar fashion it investigated the cases of women in other kinds of employment affected by the law, and came to a similar conclusion.

Since this committee was organized with the purpose of helping women made destitute by the law, and since it drew its statistics from various kinds of sources, partisan and non-partisan, one has a right to believe that its report is unprejudiced—or as unprejudiced as human reports can be, for it is very difficult for even a trained scientist to keep his emotions from biasing his conclusions. Better still, however, than even proof from an unprejudiced source is proof drawn from the facts admitted by the other side and turned against it. Although this kind of proof is practicably impregnable, in utilizing it, just as in employing *reductio ad absurdum*, the arguer must be sure that he is being fair and just and not allowing himself verbal quibbling to gain his point. In short, the main thing for the student to remember in marshaling proof is that every aspect of his argument should be made real and solid by the use, if possible, of *honest* and *true facts*. Without them the cleverest argument conceivable will crumble into nothing.

Nevertheless, in cases where one is dealing with a project not previously tried, one cannot always give statistics, specific instances, etc., for every point in the argument, for the very fact that it has not been tried makes it impossible for one to do so. Then one must resort to expert opinions, the judgment of persons who are regarded as authorities in the field in which the subject lies. If one were arguing whether or not the United States should grant the Philippines independence, one would have to refer to authorities in discussing the probability of their seizure by another nation in case of their liberation by the United States. One could investigate the utterances of such men as Newton W. Gilbert, formerly vice-governor of the Philippine Islands, Vincente Villamin, Filipino lawyer and publicist, Marcial P. Lichauco, co-author of *The Conquest of the Philippines by the United States*, and could find quite contradictory prophecies as to the probability of such a seizure. Consequently each side could at least offset the other by quoting an eminent authority in favor of its views. Evidence of this kind is, however, quite worthless unless it is reproduced verbatim and the reader made acquainted with the identity and status of the person quoted. Experts such as "a prominent Harvard historian," "a millionaire ex-brewer of New York City," "an eminent social leader," are so completely without weight that the student might as well save himself the trouble of quoting their anonymous words. Unless the writer makes known to the reader the name, experience,



and position of the authority, he is foolish to believe that the quoted opinion will in any way affect the reader's judgment. In fairness also to his opponent he must make clear who and what his authority is. For one way in which the opponent minimizes expert opinion against his views is to show, if possible, the untrustworthiness of the authority in question. This he may do by demonstrating that the authority has financial or other interests at stake which make him necessarily take sides, that he lacks experience or knowledge, that he has proved himself in other judgments unsound, etc. If the authority against the writer is unimpeachable, then he must try to find as expert opinion, an authority of equal standing, to bolster up his own views. In both these methods of defense, the opponent must know the identity of the authority on the opposite side, for he cannot very well invalidate the judgment of an expert or quote an opinion equally well backed unless he has such information. Consequently both the opponent and the audience are justified in refusing to accept the testimony of an anonymous authority—no matter how expert it sounds.

Once in a while the opinion of an expert can be effectively quoted in favor of a project which has already been tried, particularly if the authority is shown to have interests which would lead him rather to disfavor than favor the proposed plan. Thus, because Mr. E. A. Filene owns one of the largest department stores in Boston, one would naturally expect him to be against the proposal of a legally decreed minimum wage for wom-

en. Instead, he is in favor of the plan, and the affirmative in an argument about minimum wage could extract quotations from his article in the *American Economic Review* and present them with telling effect on the reader. In a similar fashion, if the arguer for the negative can quote in favor of his views an authority whom one would expect to be on the other side because of financial or other interests, he does well to do so.

This type of evidence is of varying value; in cases where all the reliable authorities may be on one side (as in the case of fundamentalism *vs.* Darwinism, or the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays) it is of great value. In others, however, it becomes weak, especially when as good authorities can be cited for one view as for its opposite. Then, of course, the evidence on one side simply cancels that on the other. In those cases where one has to use the evidence of authority, since better evidence is not available, one should find as authorities eminent and experienced persons whose opinions are not the result of any interests they may have at stake, or better still whose opinions seem quite to contradict such interests. The general rule, however, is to use facts as evidence wherever possible and authorities only where facts are not available.

## XII. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN INFORMAL AND FORMAL ARGUMENT

Unless one intends to enter political life or feels the need of publishing an article against some measure

proposed by the government, by the church, or by the school, one will have little practical use for formal argument. Yet without a study of it, few students will know how to discriminate between good and bad reasoning, how to test their own arguing, how to build up convincing and impregnable proof. In later life, a student will need such training, for whether he enters business or a profession, he will at some time find himself at loggerheads with his colleagues concerning a policy, a theory, an attitude—perhaps even some matter of fact—and upon his ability to argue convincingly will depend his success in carrying his point.

To be sure some of the informal arguments which one finds in current magazines follow illogical plans. Like most magazine articles of non-fiction content, they are divided into sections. The first section makes the reader vaguely acquainted with the matter to be argued and takes up a point, or even two points, of the proof; the second section develops perhaps a minor point under one of these two points; the third section probably returns to one of the two main points of the first section; etc. For a reader with a trained mind an article of this kind is difficult to follow; as soon as he discovers that the author is reasoning in an unsystematic fashion, he will throw the magazine article aside. This kind of argument was probably introduced by men trained in journalistic prose, a kind of writing so devised that it may be concluded at any point without spoiling the sense of the article. Perhaps the fact that people read magazines

largely for amusement makes them tolerate such articles, but it is doubtful whether any but a tired or careless reader is convinced by them. In fact, the magazines themselves evidence some dissatisfaction with such articles in that now and then they publish sound informal arguments, with as firm and logical plans as those used by the most careful debaters.

There is little use in the student's training himself in the production of unsystematic argument. In fact, if he does so in his teens and then consciously practices it until he is twenty-five, he will form mental habits which will handicap him all his life. To write a good informal argument—and by "good" is meant one which covers all the ground and progresses logically—the student should make the equivalent of a brief, then discard the plan and write freely. An informal argument, thus developed, must finally retain two of the essential parts of a formal argument: (1) it must through definition and history of the subject make the question to be argued clear and exact in the mind of the reader, and (2) it must take up the issues whether it states them explicitly or not. Just as in formal argument, a student will have arrived at these issues by considering the other side of the question and deriving them from a clash of opinion. In developing the finished article, the writer of informal argument will follow the practices to be observed in good formal argument: he will reason primarily deductively and will use facts as proof.

## XIII. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF INFORMAL ARGUMENTS

Daily one uses informal argument in defending a theory, in urging a policy, or in upholding an opinion. An informal argument which defends a theory or proposes a hypothesis has a more or less set form. If the problem to be solved is one which nobody has ever noticed, the writer first tells the circumstances which drew his attention to it, then states it, formulates his solution, and shows how the solution adequately accounts for all the facts involved. This plan is practically expository in method. If, however, two possible solutions for the problem occur to the writer, he presents both of them and then shows how one is preferable to the other in that it is more consistent with the evidence he has gathered. In doing so, he is using argument, and his method does not differ greatly from that of a writer who attempts to set up a new hypothesis for an old. In this last case—when the problem is known and theories have been offered for its solution—usually a writer first states the problem, the length of time that it has been discussed and that he, himself, has been considering it. He then offers the differing hypotheses which have been proposed and the evidence for them. He proceeds to attack the old solutions by showing how they do not explain all aspects of the problem; and last of all introduces his own theory, demonstrating that it is consistent with all evidence both old and new. One can easily see that from the overthrow of the opposing solutions to the end, this plan of argument is a modification of:

- I. There are abuses in the present system.
- II. The proposed plan will remedy the abuses.
- III. No better plan is known. (See page 238.)

The greatest difference between the formal argument covered by these three topics and the informal one of the kind we have been discussing is that in the former case the issues are stated but in the latter they are usually implied.

This set plan is used not only by scholars and scientists in defense of their views but also by professional men and business men outside academic walls. Suppose a civil engineer in a contractor's office believes that the plan of construction of a proposed dam will prove not only impractical but dangerous to adjacent valleys. Although he feels too timid to approach the executives of the firm in person, yet he is able to find courage to write out his views and present them by letter. If he has a well-trained mind, he will follow in developing them a plan similar to that of a scientist championing a new hypothesis against an old. In the same way plans for securing efficiency in an office, for meeting competition, or for soliciting customers will fall into some such framework.

In defending an opinion, one also uses informal argument, but one hopes not so much to prove one's case as to justify one's attitude and to gain the sympathetic understanding of one's readers. This kind of argument tries to persuade rather than to convince. Suppose the student believed that all young men should



in part work their way through college. In developing his argument, he would state the problem and his attitude toward it; then he would develop a series of "points," which would include exposition of the main advantages gained by the student who works his way and disparagement of the arguments used by those who believe that a student in college should not be hampered by outside employment. Actually these points are issues, though they will not be stated as such. They must, moreover, completely cover the subject. In writing of such an argument the student would *enthusiastically* express his belief that high qualities of character, spiritual insight, and a keen appreciation of life's values are developed in men who work their way through college. Instead of presenting his "points" in the cold, rational manner we associate with formal argument, he would "let himself go" now and then and attempt by an emotional appeal to arouse the reader's sympathetic approval of his views. A young writer, however, must keep his pen within bounds, for if he becomes too rhetorical, he will make the reader suspicious of his sincerity. In informal argument, as in all kinds of writing, restraint, courtesy and suavity play important parts.

## CHAPTER XII

### LETTER-WRITING

#### I. BUSINESS LETTERS

Letter-writing, the type of composition in which every cultivated person engages, is in some respects the simplest but in others the most complex sort of composition. It is simplest because it is most informal and slight in extent; most complex because it uses all the four forms. Letters divide themselves into two main kinds: those of business and those of friendship. The former use exposition and argument solely. As their aim is usually simple and practical, the writer trained in those forms and gifted with some tact can have no difficulty in producing successful results. A writer of a business letter should always put himself in the place of the recipient and ask himself: "If I received this letter, should I gain from it the impression that the writer had a trained and intelligent mind, a sincere and dependable character? In short, is he a person whom I should care to do business with or have in my employ?" If the business letter concerns not the writer himself but the organization which he represents, he should still put some such question to himself, for business concerns are as surely characterized by the letters their employees write as they are by the kind of goods they sell. The following letter, for example, is modeled upon one ac-

tually sent out by a second-rate department store of a large city.

THE MARKET STORE.

722 West 8th Street  
City.

Dec. 5, 1928.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Yours of the 4th inst. received. Will look into the matter of the day-bed's delay. Expect it within four days at the outside. Appreciating your most valuable patronage, we are

Yours,

JOHN FIXWELL

*Mgr. Adjustment Section*

On the other hand, the next letter, sent by a stock-broker to one of his clients, touches upon a much more embarrassing matter than the delay of a "day-bed"—namely, the temporary failure of the client's investment undertaken at the broker's advice. Yet the broker writes so courteously and convincingly that his client will realize that he is dealing with a reliable firm. The form of this letter (the heading, the salutation, the close, the avoidance of abbreviation), the English used, the sense of fair-dealing conveyed—all mark this second illustration as coming from the pen of a gentleman.

BREADMAR, MILLER & CO.

595 Wide Street  
New York City

August 5, 1928

*Mr. Napier Williams*  
*1991 Rodney Street*  
*Brooklyn, New York*

DEAR SIR:

We regret to inform you that the directors of the X—, Y—, Z— Company at a meeting held August 4th passed the dividends on both the common and preferred shares. This decision

was a great surprise to all of us. From conversations held some weeks ago with the directors and officers of that company, we had learned that its earnings for 1927 were not so great as in the previous years and had concluded that this condition might result in the passing of the common dividend; but we did not believe that there would be any change in the preferred.

Although no statements are actually available until the annual meeting of stockholders on August 27th, we learned today from one of the officers of the company that some charges for obsolete inventory have amounted to more than the directors at first thought. Until, however, the figures are actually published in the *Annual Report* for 1927, we do not feel it wise to give you any definite advice about the matter.

Making mental estimates and considering the *Annual Report* for 1926, we believe that the preferred stock has an intrinsic value of over \$150.00 a share. There was, as you know, a change in the management of the company last year, it may be that the new administration, finding it necessary to meet some disagreeable facts, are sensibly facing them all at once to put a bad situation behind them. Such a policy, of course, promises well for the future.

We shall aim to keep you advised of any further information that may come into our hands.

Very truly yours,

G. A. ARMSTRONG

This letter gives even a reader who knows nothing of stocks and bonds the impression that the writer is honestly facing facts and carefully weighing them for the sake of the client whose interests he has at heart. The letter has such an effect because its prose is clear and unaffected; its tone, courteous, yet dignified—qualities which any tactful writer trained in composition can secure.

## II. LETTERS OF FRIENDSHIP

Letters of friendship are more subtle and individual than business letters. They use all the forms of discourse, and they require personal qualities of geniality,

warm-heartedness, intelligence, taste, and artistic sense. The list may seem awesome, but it does not exclude many people who have a sufficiently pleasing personality to attract friends. The real reason for the paucity of good letter-writers is the failure of people to consider letter-writing as a means of expressing themselves and of pleasing and holding their friends. Too many people are satisfied with a few trite formulas expressing good wishes and with two or three extremely general and vague reports of happenings. Yet letter-writing is one of the oldest forms of composition, practiced by the Apostle Paul, by Petrarch, and many other literary men of the Renaissance, by Lamb, Gray, Stevenson, and indeed by almost all of the people distinguished in literature or learning.

It ought not to be necessary to dwell upon the advantages which a good letter-writer gains: he gives pleasure to all the people with whom he corresponds and to any others to whom his friends show or read his letters; he has the enjoyment of expressing himself; he keeps his personality vivid in the minds of absent friends and binds them to him; incidentally he may advance himself professionally or commercially.

### III. WHAT MAKES PERSONAL LETTERS INTERESTING?

#### THE PERSONALITY OF THE WRITER

The good letter-writer, as we have noted, must have a genial, friendly personality: he must really care for the friends to whom he writes. Moreover, he must be a person of wide and keen sympathies; and, if possible,

he should be a good observer of many aspects of life, one who tastes life with gusto and feels enthusiasm and happiness in the experiences which life brings him. To a greater or less extent, almost anyone can cultivate these qualities, and certainly one increases one's own enjoyment of life by doing so. Some people seem to go through life as if it were monotonous routine: if they really feel it to be so and perceive nothing new, fresh, or delightful in the experiences of each day, theirs is certainly a death in life, an existence not worth living. It is certainly better to pretend that life is enjoyable and to try to get from each experience a "kick" than to exist in that fashion, and it is astonishing how one can find trivial experiences delightful if one tries to do so. If a student succeeds in such an attempt, he becomes a person who can write good letters, for the good letter-writer is one who bubbles over with enthusiasm over his experiences.

#### THE MATERIAL USED

The letter-writer should never lose sight of one important fact: his correspondent cares more about what is going on in his mind than about mere events. To be sure, the friend wants to know about the writer's experiences, but he desires more to know what effects they have produced on the writer. Thus many experiences arouse a person's sense of humor: the letter-writer should narrate them in such a way as to show that their absurdity appealed to him (and, by way of digression, it should be added that no element in a letter is more



pleasing than humor). Or an experience may "set a person to thinking" and generalizing on aspects of life: the ideas thus suggested should appear in the letter which narrates the incidents. Really, simple incidents and ordinary experiences, which arouse one's sense of fun or stimulate one to thinking, and all the varying moods or feelings which constitute one's mental life are the best material for letters. It is much more difficult to interest a friend in one's experiences during travel or in extraordinary scenes and events (unless the writer is a considerable artist). Specifically, what a person is reading, the plays he sees, or the music he hears provide good material for letters. Not that one should write miniature reviews or criticisms, or that one should summarize plots of books or plays (the dreariest reading in the world!) but that one can suggest the effect of them upon one's self, individual bits which impressed one strongly and general ideas which were suggested. Of course, if one's correspondent has read the book (or other books by the same author) or has seen the play or "movie," one can give more detailed opinions as to the writer's philosophy or art.

Aside from such subjective material, sketches of the interesting people the student is meeting, of scenes which have pleased him, and narratives of amusing events or incidents characteristic of the life about him are proper material for letters. With this material, whatever ability one has in narration and description will find exercise. Likewise (especially if one is older than

one's friend, a former teacher perhaps) one may wish to explain ideas not clear to him, advise him when he is in doubt as to his best procedure, or argue with him when his ideas or his course of action seem wrong. Thus any single good letter may combine all four forms of composition or any two or three of them.

#### IV. ADAPTING THE LETTER TO THE RECIPIENT

One determinant of the trend that a letter will take and of its selection of material is the personality of the friend to whom it is addressed. Everyone has many different types among his friends, some appealing to one aspect of his nature, some to another. The effective letter-writer in every line of a letter has in mind the particular person to whom he is writing. He does not retail minutiae of college life to a person who has never attended college, but gives such general suggestions of college conditions as his correspondent can understand. He cannot discuss detailed problems of philosophy, economics, or literary history in a letter designed for someone who knows nothing about those subjects. On the other hand, to a specialist in one of those studies he can "let himself go." In other words, the good letter-writer adapts himself to the personality of his friends, just as the good conversationalist does to that of his hearers. Of one famous letter-writer of the fifteenth century it is said that a reader can discern the personalities of the individuals to whom he writes far more clearly than one can that of the writer himself.

Yet, in adapting the material of a letter to his cor-

respondent, one should not become self-conscious and mannered. In letter-writing simplicity and genuine interest in what one is saying are indispensable. If one seems consciously to be making an art of letter-writing, an element of insincerity, a suggestion of the writer as acting a part in a drama of his own devising, become obvious. Even in so charming a letter-writer as R. L. Stevenson, some readers feel this self-consciousness. A little more plainness and commonplaceness would be actually of advantage in his letters. So the student in his letters should try to avoid any apparent "literary note."

#### V. PRACTICAL HINTS ON LETTER-FORM

Finally a few practical notes may be advisable. The salutation in business letters contains the name and address of the person or firm to whom they are addressed followed by "Dear Sir:" "Dear Mr. Smith:" or, in the case of a firm, "Gentlemen:" Examples: (See also, on pages 258-59, the business letter from G. A. Armstrong.)

*Mr. John Smith* (in England, *John Smith, Esq.*)  
*Brentford, Maine.*

DEAR SIR:

*or*

DEAR MR. SMITH:

*Brown, Jones and Company*  
*415 South State Street*  
*Chicago, Illinois*

GENTLEMEN:

In beginning business letters as well as in addressing envelopes, one should use few, if any, abbreviations:

they may save time, but they give a letter or an envelope an appearance of carelessness and haste which makes a bad impression upon the correspondent. Personal letters begin without name and address but with "Dear——" "My dear——", e.g., "Dear Mr. Smith," "Dear Smith," "Dear Tom" (as the degree of intimacy warrants). No letter should ever start with merely "Mr. Smith"—a form of address which is really an insult. Nor should one ever write "Dear Friend."

In the letter one should never omit the subject of a verb. The habit of writing in such a style as this: "Went to the city and bumped into Donald at the oculist's, etc.," is uncouth and is used only by uneducated persons. Educated people of the old school never begin a letter with "I." Though this rule is now not regarded as important, yet a young person had better bear it in mind when writing to old-fashioned folk if he wishes to make a good impression on them.

The heading and closing of the letter follow set forms. The heading consists of three lines: on the first line appears the number of the house and the street; on the second, the city and state; on the third, the date:

88 CHAMPNEY PLACE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
April 24, 1928

If one has stamped stationery, the form of course will follow the fashion of the day: this three-line form, however, is standard for a hand-written or typed heading. The formula of conclusion is "Yours . . . ," fol-

lowed or preceded by an adverb (*truly, sincerely, cordially, faithfully, lovingly, etc.*), which should never be omitted.

*Exercise:* Criticize the following letters:

September 4th.

DEAR FRIEND:

My trip this summer surely was a fine one. Of the many places that attracted my attention while touring the eastern part of our country, Washington, our nation's capital, impressed me the most favorably. My only regret is that my time did not permit me to remain longer and visit more of the many beautiful government buildings and memorials erected there. I shall try to describe two places which undoubtedly are of special interest to all patriotic Americans.

Upon my arrival at the seat of government, my attention was immediately drawn to an imposing shaft of marble, known as the Washington National Monument. Its stately and majestic appearance I shall not forget; it is like a sentinel guarding the welfare of our country. The other place I shall remember is the nation's Capitol, located upon a commanding situation about one mile east from the Washington National Monument. The majesty and beauty of this building impressed me to such an extent that I know I'll not be doing justice to it in trying to describe it to you. It is a source of pride and satisfaction to me to know that we are a part of that country which the building represents.

I could write more about my wonderful trip, but I must busy myself with work for the fall pageant. I hope I'll hear from you soon.

As ever,

MAGGIE.

43 PERRY AVENUE  
BRIDGMAN, MASSACHUSETTS  
November 4, 1927

DEAR MRS. ROLLINS,

I should have written you long before, for I did enjoy the call; but I kept thinking we'd be on the Cape again and might drop in on you. Then after that hope was gone, I thought I might as well wait until I had finished *Jean-Christophe*. It is finished at last and on its homeward way. The book is so tremendous that it made me feel woefully stupid. I can't remember half the things I learned from it,

and while reading it, I found, at times, difficulty in following the discourse with clear comprehension. The book should be studied rather than read casually.

Perhaps old Schopenhauer was not far wrong in saying that women are incapable of grasping abstractions. I have been alternating *Jean-Christophe* with Ibsen, and I have had quite a session with the latter. I don't like Ibsen: his characters are bloodless creatures, talking machines without a human trait, and are mostly personifications of ideas like "sins-of-the-fathers-visited-unto-the-children" and "one's-duty-to-one's-self," etc. At any rate I didn't like *A Doll's House*, and *Ghosts* nearly drove me into hysteria. Whereupon I was gravely taken to task by the friend who is relaying me his modern drama course. He said that I was looking at Ibsen from the wrong angle, that it wasn't characters or setting in which he excelled, but that "one can't help admiring him for his marvelous developing of an idea." Then he added the condescending advice to try Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* because he was sure I'd like it better. He was, I think, in the state of mind to recommend *Abie's Irish Rose* to me if he had dared.

So it was with *Jean-Christophe*. There was such a lot for me to learn—about France and German thought and philosophy and music; and all I *actually learned* was how little I really know about music. Yet I think I have as much knowledge about it as nine-tenths of the people. At any rate, I discovered that I have a very vulgar and depraved taste because Massenet's *Elegie* makes nice shivers go up and down my spine! In spite of the fact that I failed to grasp most of the solid part of the book, I plain loved it for its characters and scenes: Christophe's visit to old Schultz is one of the loveliest and most touching incidents I have ever read. And I loved Gottfried's philosophy, too: "Als ich kann" is not a bad motto for anybody's life. And I loved Antoinette and Olivier and the thousand and one people I met casually. And what do you make of the perfectly extraordinary prominence given to the Jews? Did you notice that Rolland gives all of them the same attitude of disinterested, ironic curiosity toward life?

The minister's wife—one of the few kindred spirits in Brüdgerman—called while I was reading *Jean-Christophe*, and I discovered that she, too, had read it. We got talking of Christophe and Olivier and friendship. I had been wondering—and am wondering still—whether women are capable of such great friendships as men. She said that friendships between men were encouraged by the world outside



more than friendships between women; a friendship between men like Olivier and Christophe is called a great and beautiful thing, but a similar friendship between women is regarded askance. I suppose a man can't bear the idea of being only of secondary importance to his wife. When I come to think of it, I have recently read an article in *Harper's* which said that women's colleges were bad in their influence, for in them, women formed friendships with other women which made them less apt to marry. Of course, I disagree violently, for I think the marrying kind marry anyway and the college experience gives those who are left interests and friendships to keep them from becoming the creatures, starved in mind and spirit, that one finds in such numbers in the small-town spinsters. I, for one, feel positively cheated because I have never experienced a really great friendship. The girls I love best in the world, like Winifred and Betty, cannot share my mental interests, and those who interest my mind are either older women, like you and Mrs. Royce, or men, like Ted and the modern drama man. The girl whom I loved most, heart and mind—we read *Little Women* together at the age of eight and *Sentimental Tommy* in high-school days—unfortunately put her brains in cold storage on her wedding day. Besides, she now lives in Baltimore. So I can't tell from my experience whether or not deep friendships are an exclusively masculine attainment. What do you think?

It was very good of you to send me *Jean-Christophe*. You are lovely to me anyway, and I'm afraid you are going to be disappointed in me. Sometimes I think writing is not my bent at all; but Heaven knows what else I want to do or could do. From the foregoing, you may judge that I've struck a snag in the literary labors. Oh well—I'm reading Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, and that's jolly. And I'm going to read *Marie Chapelaine* and *Growth of the Soil*. I must stop now, for the radio is going, and I can't hear myself think.

Lovingly yours,  
PAT.

6040 ELLIS AVENUE  
PRINCETON, ILLINOIS  
June 5, 1928

DEAR DICK,

When your letter came I suddenly woke up to the fact that I owed letters to absolutely everyone; so I had to get busy, with the result that the last two weeks have been one feverish rush of letter-writing. While I was at it, I determined to clean up my debts even

to the maiden aunts and second cousins. Some of them were so surprised to hear from me, after a silence of nearly a year, that they straightway answered, and now I have to do the writing all over again. You see, I have the persons to whom I can write neatly divided into two classes: those to whom I can write what I think and those to whom I can write only what I do. The latter class—for one who leads such an uneventful life as I—offers a real and none too interesting problem. They can easily write to me, for they mostly live in Quincy and can tell me who is engaged to whom and how much money they have lost on the latest church bazaar. But as they don't know Princeton, I can't reciprocate. In fact, never until I moved here did I realize how much our conversation is made up of the patter of personalities. I was absolutely tongue-tied (if you can imagine such a thing of me) among young people when I first came here. Now, after two years, I have acquired enough knowledge of intimate family scandals to gain access to the best bridge tables.

As far as books are concerned, I shall indeed take advantage of your offer to lend me some this summer, when we are in South Denis. We have the funniest collection there! Father got them second hand, fifty for ten dollars or something like that, everything from *Elizabeth and her German Garden* to Dostoevski's *House of the Dead*. We don't have eighteen Bibles, but we have enough to go around the family with a few left over. (By the way, the Old Testament is one of the things I've been trying to reread this winter as well as Chapman's *Homer*. Father wanted me to do Pope's, but I thought that Keats's recommendation was good enough for me!) To return—the only "uniquity" of our South Denis library is that it contains thirty-seven volumes of Balzac and seven of Daudet. Our purchases for the past year consist of such things as Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, Trollope's *Three Clerks*, *Six Elizabethan Plays* (not Shakespeare's), etc. They show the kind of people we are—respectable, but very, very conservative, though our conservatism, if not our respectability, may in part be accounted for by the fact that Father gets a big discount on all books where the royalty has expired.

I am having a pesky time with the *Rosa hugonis*! You never in all your born days saw such a "buggy" plant. I have mislaid the "Black Leaf 40." With Mother away I hunted everywhere for it, from the medicine closet to the cupboard for cleaning-fluids, and at last I was reduced to picking the things patiently off by hand. And, if you only knew how I loathe crawly things! To be sure, my "rose garden" is patrolled by a pompous toad that I call Finnerty Flynn

after a cop that "pinched" Chester upon an historic occasion for careless driving, but this particular kind of bug doesn't appeal to Finnerty Flynn at all. I, too, am going to read up on perennial gardens—a sudden resolution based on the fact that there are seven established or budding perennial gardens in this neighborhood, and I must be able to understand what their owners fight about. They seem to care not so much about growing flowers as vying with one another, and they visit one another's gardens not to appreciate, but—metaphorically speaking—to pull everything up and plant it over again.

All of this is, of course, light banter, a superficial nothing beside the living fact that Beatrice has a daughter two weeks old. I was much surprised at the event. Daily I fear I shall receive news that the baby has died, for the existence of a premature baby is precarious anyway, and this little one weighs less than three pounds. I'll write more on the subject to your mother in a week or so when I know more. So until then,

Sincerely yours,

B. B. H.

CHICAGO

Monday

DEAR FRIEND,

Received your pretty gift and letter during my Christmas vacation at home with the folks. Meant to write you right away to thank you for both of them. But Christmas week the folks kept me busy with the usual round of celebrations. They sure did see that I had a good time!

I'm now back at school in Chicago. I share a small apartment here with another girl. My cousin, Helen, spent Friday night with me. We did a lot of talking but I can't remember much of what we said.

During this spring quarter I'm carrying four majors. Won't I be glad to see the farm again in June. I have two more years to go before I graduate.

Can you come to the farm to see me this summer. Mother will be glad to put you up for as long as you care to stop with us.

Do you remember that silk dress Mother made me last spring? I bought a hat of a heavenly shade of blue that just goes with it.

Love,

LULU.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PUNCTUATION

#### I. PERIOD (.)

1. A period is used to indicate the end of a declarative sentence.
2. A period follows an abbreviation, but not a contraction:

mfg.	sec.
m'f'g	sec'y

#### II. EXCLAMATION POINT (!)

3. An exclamation point is used to mark an outcry or a command:

Long live the king!  
Alas! No longer am I as young as I once was.  
Don't take chances!

#### III. INTERROGATION POINT (?)

4. An interrogation point is used at the end of direct questions:

Who is the author of the book?

In considering this method, we are faced by several questions: Is it feasible? Is it economical? Will it save time and labor?

N.B. The interrogation point is not used after indirect questions:

He asked the woman who she was and what she was doing.

## IV. COLON (:)

5. The colon is used to indicate that a series follows:

He urged us to turn back for several reasons: our food was running low; Ned needed medical attention; we were entering a region inhabited by warlike tribes.

6. The colon is used to introduce a long quotation or a formal summary:

I quote from Senator Pfeiffer's address: "On September 22, 1928. . . ."

Professor Howell's argument runs thus: If one accepts the hypothesis of a single author, one has to make. . . .

## V. SEMICOLON (;)

7. Co-ordinate clauses, not connected by co-ordinate conjunctions, are separated by semicolons.

Observe the difference between the following sentences, both of which are correctly punctuated:

The baggage was cumbersome; our shoes were heavy; Lucy's two hundred pounds of weight were not conducive to speed.

The baggage was cumbersome; our shoes were heavy; nor was Lucy's two hundred pounds of weight conducive to speed.

N.B. Words like *so*, *accordingly*, *hence*, *therefore*, *furthermore*, *however*, are adverbs and not co-ordinate conjunctions. Hence, if used between clauses, they must be preceded by semicolons:

He made no effort to contradict them; therefore I thought their accusations were true.

8. A semicolon is used to separate the clauses of a compound sentence joined by a co-ordinate conjunction (*viz., and, but, or, nor, for*) when either clause contains commas or other punctuation (see 10 below):

Are we going to perpetuate the things that the past has created for its needs, forgetting to ask whether these things still serve today's needs; or are we thinking of living men?

9. Semicolons are used to divide the various parts of a series unless it is of a simple character for which commas will suffice:

The membership of the international commission was made up as follows: France, 4; Germany, 5; Italy, 3.

The defendant in justification of his act pleaded that (1) he was despondent over the loss of his wife; (2) he was out of work; (3) he. . . .

From California come many kinds of citrous fruit: lemons, oranges, grapefruit, . . . .

## VI. COMMA (,)

10. A comma is used to separate the clauses of a compound sentence joined by a co-ordinate conjunction (*viz., and, but, or, nor, for*) when neither clause contains commas or other punctuation (see 8 above):

I would not if I could, and I could not if I would.

11. Commas are used to set off a non-restrictive (characteristic) but not a restrictive clause or phrase.



## EFFECTIVE ENGLISH

A non-restrictive clause or phrase merely adds information about the noun it modifies:

He suffered seven years from fever, which he had contracted in the African jungle.

Even Fag's followers, who were not squeamish as to the methods they employed, would have nothing to do with him after the Lester scandal.

England, highly democratic though it is, offers a poor boy little chance for a thorough education.

A restrictive clause or phrase limits or narrows the noun it modifies:

He suffered seven years from the sickness which he had contracted in the African jungle.

Even those of Fag's followers who were not squeamish as to the method they employed would have nothing to do with him after the Lester affair.

England with her scattered empire is dependent upon her navy for her very existence.

12. Words, phrases, and clauses which precede the subject of the main clause are usually, though not invariably, separated from it by a comma:

"Oh, why did not Cerberus drag me back to hell?"

Furthermore, I have known him since he was a boy and have followed his career with loving interest.

Exhausted by the hard work, he slept like a stone.

With her scattered empire, England is dependent upon a large navy for her very existence.

To John, Smith was always kind.

When you come to the crossroads, you will see the mound called "the suicide's grave."

N.B. The comma is usually omitted after an introductory word or phrase (seldom after a clause) when the subject of the main clause follows the verb:

Hence arose the belief that the soul is immortal.

Across my mind flashed the thought that I had seen him before.

13. Commas are used to set off words, phrases, or clauses that interrupt the thought of the sentence. Such words, phrases, or clauses are often parenthetical in function:

Chicago, Illinois, is the greatest railroad center in the United States of America.

This statement, however, can be verified.

This road leads away from, rather than toward, your destination.

The French, generally speaking, are a nation of artists.

I am convinced, since she is not here, that she has been forcibly detained.

14. Commas are used to set off a noun in apposition:

My first husband, John Whitmore, died in 1896.

Jean, my daughter, nursed her with great care.

N.B. In the preceding sentences, the words inclosed in commas are non-restrictive in function (see 11 above). In the following sentence, however, *Jean* is restrictive in function and so is not inclosed in commas:

My daughter Jean nursed her with great care.

15. Commas are used to separate the elements of a simple series:

For a series of two or more co-ordinate clauses, see rules 7, 8, 9, and 10 above.

In a series of two co-ordinate words or phrases:

a) A comma is omitted when the words or phrases are connected by a co-ordinate conjunction:

Pretty and foolish, Madge straightway lost her head.

Feverishly, he searched the pockets of his coat and trousers.

b) A comma is used for division when the words or phrases are not connected by a co-ordinate conjunction:

Pretty, foolish Madge straightway lost her head.

Feverishly, he searched the pockets of his coat, then of his trousers.

N.B. In such combinations as "a bright blue hat," "admirable political institutions," commas are omitted in spite of the absence of the co-ordinate conjunction.

In a series of three or more co-ordinate words or phrases, such words or phrases are separated from each other by commas. This rule holds, even if the last two words or phrases are connected by a co-ordinate conjunction:

In turn, she pleaded with her mother, with her father, with her brothers and sister; but each refused her request.

In turn, she pleaded with her mother, with her father, and with her brothers and sister; but each refused her request.

Mayhew proved to be a quiet, simple, lovable sort of person.

Mayhew proved to be a quiet, simple, and lovable sort of person.

16. A brief direct quotation should be separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma or commas (see 6 above):

I heard a stifled, "Yes," as she lifted amused eyes to mine.

"*Festina lente*," said my tutor every time I tripped over a crack in the pavement.

"If you are determined to carry out your plan," he pleaded, "at least let me stay here with you."

N.B. The following direct quotations are also correctly punctuated:

"Are you determined to carry out your plan?" he asked. "Well, then, I'm going to stay right here with you."

"Don't carry out your plan!" he urged. "Or, at least, let me be present when you do!"

17. A comma is used to indicate the omission of words readily understood from the context of the sentence:

In Illinois there are seventeen such institutions; in Ohio, twenty-two; in Indiana, thirteen.

## VII. DASH (—)

Students often substitute the dash for the comma, the semicolon, the period. Such loose use of it should be avoided.

18. A dash is used to denote a sudden break in the thought or construction of a sentence:

Do we—*can* we—send out educated boys and girls from the high schools at eighteen?

Here we are face to face with a new and difficult problem—new and difficult in the sense that. . . .

"I don't believe—I don't dare believe you!" (She wept, as she spoke.) "You have deceived me often—too often and too deliberately for me to trust you again."

19. A dash is used before a summarizing expression:

Amos, to whom Jehovah was an upright judge; Hosea, whose Lord hated injustice and falsehood; Isaiah, whose God would have mercy only on those who relieved the widow and the fatherless—these were the prophets whose ideas prepared the world for the coming of Christ.

I'll take care of the children, if both you and Irene should die—a tragedy, which I pray God to prevent.

20. Dashes are used to set off an expression, usually appositive, which the writer wishes to emphasize. If he desires to indicate that it is purely incidental, he incloses it in parentheses:

These discoveries—gunpowder, printing press, compass, and telescope—were the weapons before which the old science trembled.

The Irish-Americans (naturalized Americans born in Ireland) are influential in the politics of American cities.

21. A dash is used, at times, instead of a colon before a simple series:

This is true of only two nations—namely, of Great Britain and France.

He had many of the qualities desirable in an executive—tact, poise, vision, and judgment.

### VIII. PARENTHESES ( )

22. Parentheses are used to mark the members of a numbered series:

The reasons for his resignation were three: (1) advanced age, (2) failing health, (3) a desire to travel.

23. Parentheses are used to inclose explanatory matter which the writer does not wish to emphasize or any expression which is wholly irrelevant to the main argument (compare 13 and 20 above):

A slimy, gray mixture which smelled like the essence of elderly eggs (effective alliteration!) was all that was left of my culinary efforts.

## IX. BRACKETS ( [ ] )

24. Brackets are used to indicate that the enclosed letters or words are not found in the original quotation or text and have been interpolated by the author or editor to correct it or to make its sense clear:

“And there [saw] his ladie braiding her hair.”

A huge negro in sweeping, white robes addressed us in perfect English: “Monsieur, I am the son of Tulah [the King of the Danhalki tribes], and I, myself, shall take you to the place where the elephants die.”

“As the Italian [*sic*], Dante Gabriel Rossetti has said. . . .” *Sic* is the Latin word for *so* or *thus*. When it is interpolated by means of brackets into a quotation or text, it indicates that the error is in the original quotation or text and is not a mistake on the part of the author or editor.

## X. CAPITALS

25. Capitals mark the first word of a sentence, of a line of poetry, of a direct quotation.
26. Capitals are used to indicate proper nouns and adjectives (or common nouns used as proper nouns):

Texas; the Hyde Park High School; the Prince of Wales; President Hoover; Economics 302; Mother; the Peace of Paris; the SS. Lusitania; the President, the Pope, the King of England (i.e., the present president of the United States of America, the present pope of the Catholic church, the present king of England); the English language; the French colonies.

N.B. Use small letters for *high* and *school*, unless these words are part of the name of a specific school; for names of studies except languages, unless these names are part of the titles of specific courses; for nouns of relationship, unless such nouns are used as proper nouns:

Sunday school; economics; my mother.



27. Capitals are used for nouns and pronouns signifying the Christian deity and the Bible:  
 . . . the Trinity; God; Christ; the Holy Scriptures; in His name.
28. In the titles of books all words are capitalized except conjunctions, articles, prepositions:  
*Folklore as an Historical Science; Rome of the Pilgrims and Martyrs; The Manor and Manorial Records.*
- N.B. It is not correct to capitalize *the* at the beginning of a title, unless the word is part of the title:  
 . . . the *Chicago Daily Tribune*; *The Literary Digest.*  
 Compare *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* and Clay's *Hermits and Anchorites of England.*
29. Abbreviations which follow a person's name signifying a rank or a degree are capitalized:  
 John Smythe, R.A.; William Blonner, Kt.; Clara Ahrt, M.D.

## XI. QUOTATION MARKS (“ ”)

30. Quotation marks inclose a direct quotation. (See the examples under 16 above and under other rules.)
31. When a quotation occurs within a quotation, double quotation marks inclose single quotation marks.
32. Quotation marks are used to indicate words and phrases not in good English usage: i.e., coined words, slang, colloquialisms, shortenings, etc.  
 “pep”; “folks”; “movies”; “talkies.”

XII. ITALICS (In writing or typing underlining takes the place of italics)

33. The titles of books, magazines, plays, poems, etc. are italicized. (See examples under 28.)
34. Foreign words or phrases appearing in the midst of a sentence or paragraph are italicized:

*De gustibus non est disputandum*, or, as the French have it, *chacun à son goût*.

35. The following words and abbreviations are italicized:

*ibid.* (the same reference); *infra* (below); *loc. cit.* (place cited); *op. cit.* (work cited); *passim* (here and there); *sc.* (namely); *sic* (thus); *supra* (above).

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## UNITY

- U
1. Incomplete sentence
  2. Unity of thought
  3. Grammatical unity
  4. Comma blunder
  5. Too many main clauses
  6. Too many subordinate clauses
  7. False co-ordination
  8. False subordination

## COHERENCE

### Modifiers:

- M
1. Hanging participle
  2. Hanging gerund  
(possessive before gerund)
  3. Hanging infinitive
  4. *Due to, caused by, etc.*
  5. Hanging phrase, clause
  6. Position of *only, alone, etc.*

### Verbs:

- V
1. Phrase between subject and verb
  2. Compound subject connected by *either . . . or, neither . . . nor*
  3. *Shall, should; will, would*
  4. Past and perfect tenses
  5. Pluperfect tense
  6. Present infinitive
  7. Shift in tenses
  8. Split infinitive

### Pronouns:

- P
1. No antecedent
  2. Clause as antecedent
  3. Ambiguous antecedent
  4. Shift in antecedent
  5. Agreement with antecedent
  6. The demonstrative
  7. Errors in case
  8. *Each, every, any, etc.*
  9. Common gender
  10. *One . . . he*
  11. Shift of person
  12. *Myself*
  13. *Which* as adjective

### Construction:

- C
1. Joining of declarative and interrogative clauses, etc.
  2. Shift of voice
  3. Shift of subject
  4. Parallel structure
  5. *Not . . . but that*
  6. *Nor*
  7. Ambiguity from omission
  8. *And which*
  9. *Because* clause as noun
  10. Absolute participle

## EMPHASIS

- E
1. The end of a sentence
  2. The passive voice
  3. Exclamations and rhetorical questions

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